A LAODICEAN

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A Laodicean

A STORY OF TO-DAY

BY

Thomas Hardy

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PREFACE

THE changing of the old order in country manors and mansions may be slow or sudden, may have many issues romantic or otherwise, its romantic issues being not necessarily restricted to a change back to the original order; though this admissible instance appears to have been the only romance formerly recognized by novelists as possible in the case. Whether the following production be a picture of other possibilities or not, its incidents may be taken to be fairly well supported by evidence every day forthcoming in most counties.

The writing of the tale was rendered memorable to two persons, at least, by a tedious illness of five months that laid hold of the author soon after the story was begun in a well-known magazine; during which period the narrative had to be strenuously continued by dictation to a predetermined cheerful ending.

As some of these novels of Wessex life address themselves more especially to readers into whose souls the iron has entered, and whose years have less pleasure in them now

than heretofore, so "A Laodicean" may perhaps help to while away an idle afternoon of the comfortable ones whose lines have fallen to them in pleasant places; above all, of that large and happy section of the reading public which has not yet reached ripeness of years; those to whom marriage is the pilgrim's Eternal City, and not a milestone on the way.

T. H.

January 1896.

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BOOK THE FIRST

GEORGE SOMERSET

I

THE sun blazed down and down, till it was within half-an-hour of its setting; but the sketcher still lingered at his occupation of measuring and copying the chevroned doorway—a bold and quaint example of a transitional style of architecture, which formed the tower entrance to an English village church. The graveyard being quite open on its western side, the tweed-clad figure of the young draughtsman, and the tall mass of antique masonry which rose above him to a battlemented parapet, were fired to a great brightness by the solar rays, that crossed the neighbouring mead like a warp of gold threads, in whose mazes groups of equally lustrous gnats danced and wailed incessantly.

He was so absorbed in his pursuit that he did not mark the brilliant chromatic effect of which he composed the central feature, till it was brought home to his intelligence by the warmth of the moulded stonework under his touch when measuring; which led him at length to turn his head and gaze on its cause.

There are few in whom the sight of a sunset does not beget as much meditative melancholy as contemplative pleasure, the human decline and death that it illustrates

being too obvious to escape the notice of the simplest observer. The sketcher, as if he had been brought to this reflection many hundreds of times before by the same spectacle, showed that he did not wish to pursue it just now, by turning away his face after a few moments, to resume his architectural studies.

He took his measurements carefully, and as if he reverenced the old workers whose trick he was endeavouring to acquire six hundred years after the original performance had ceased and the performers passed into the unseen. By means of a strip of lead called a leaden tape, which he pressed around and into the fillets and hollows with his finger and thumb, he transferred the exact contour of each moulding to his drawing, that lay on a sketching-stool a few feet distant; where were also a sketching-block, a small T-square, a bow-pencil, and other mathematical instruments. When he had marked down the line thus fixed, he returned to the doorway to copy another as before.

It being the month of August, when the pale face of the townsman and the stranger is to be seen among the brown skins of remotest uplanders, not only in England, but throughout the temperate zone, few of the homeward-bound labourers paused to notice him further than by a momentary turn of the head. They had beheld such gentlemen before, not exactly measuring the church so accurately as this one seemed to be doing, but painting it from a distance, or at least walking round the mouldy pile. At the same time the present visitor, even exteriorly, was not altogether commonplace. His features were good, his eyes of the dark deep sort called eloquent by the sex that ought to know, and with that ray of light in them which announces a heart susceptible to beauty of all kinds,—in woman, in art, and in inanimate nature. Though he would have been broadly characterized as a young man, his face bore contradictory testimonies to his precise age. This was conceivably owing to a too

dominant speculative activity in him, which, while it had preserved the emotional side of his constitution, and with it the significant flexuousness of mouth and chin, had played upon his forehead and temples till, at weary moments, they exhibited some traces of being over-exercised. A youthfulness about the mobile features, a mature forehead—though not exactly what the world has been familiar with in past ages—is now growing common; and with the advance of juvenile introspection it probably must grow commoner still. Briefly, he had more of the beauty—if beauty it ought to be called—of the future human type than of the past; but not so much as to make him other than a nice young man.

His build was somewhat slender and tall; his complexion, though a little browned by recent exposure, was that of a man who spent much of his time indoors. Of beard he had but small show, though he was as innocent as a Nazarite of the use of the razor; but he possessed a moustache all-sufficient to hide the subtleties of his mouth, which could thus be tremulous at tender moments without provoking inconvenient criticism.

Owing to his situation on high ground, open to the west, he remained enveloped in the lingering aureate haze till a time when the eastern part of the churchyard was in obscurity, and damp with rising dew. When it was too dark to sketch further he packed up his drawing, and, beckoning to a lad who had been idling by the gate, directed him to carry the stool and implements to a roadside inn which he named, lying a mile or two ahead. The draughtsman leisurely followed the lad out of the churchyard, and along a lane in the direction signified.

The spectacle of a summer traveller from London sketching mediæval details in these neo-Pagan days, when a lull has come over the study of English Gothic architecture, through a re-awakening to the art-forms

of times that more nearly neighbour our own, is accounted for by the fact that George Somerset, son of the Academician of that name, was a man of independent tastes and excursive instincts, who unconsciously, and perhaps unhappily, took greater pleasure in floating in lonely currents of thought than with the general tide of opinion. When quite a lad, in the days of the French-Gothic mania which immediately succeeded to the great English-pointed revival under Britton, Pugin, Rickman, Scott, and other mediævalists, he had crept away from the fashion to admire what was good in Palladian and Renaissance. As soon as Jacobean, Queen Anne, and kindred accretions of decayed styles began to be popular, he purchased such old-school works as Revett and Stuart, Chambers, and the rest, and worked diligently at the Five Orders; till quite bewildered on the question of style, he concluded that all styles were extinct, and with them all architecture as a living art. Somerset was not old enough at that time to know that, in practice, art had at all times been as full of shifts and compromises as every other mundane thing; that ideal perfection was never achieved by Greek, Goth, or Hebrew Jew, and never would be; and thus he was thrown into a mood of disgust with his profession, from which mood he was only delivered by recklessly abandoning these studies and indulging in an old enthusiasm for poetical literature. For two whole years he did nothing but write verse in every conceivable metre, and on every conceivable subject, from Wordsworthian sonnets on the singing of his tea-kettle to epic fragments on the Fall of Empires. His discovery at the age of five-and-twenty that these inspired works were not jumped at by the publishers with all the eagerness they deserved, coincided in point of time with a severe hint from his father that unless he went on with his legitimate profession he might have to look elsewhere than at home for an allowance. Mr. Somerset

junior then awoke to realities, became intently practical, rushed back to his dusty drawing-boards, and worked up the styles anew, with a view of regularly starting in practice on the first day of the following January.

It is an old story, and perhaps only deserves the light tone in which the soaring of a young man into the empyrean, and his descent again, is always narrated. But as has often been said, the light and the truth may be on the side of the dreamer: a far wider view than the wise ones have may be his at that recalcitrant time, and his reduction to common measure be nothing less than a tragic event. The operation called lunging, in which a haltered colt is made to trot round and round a horsebreaker who holds the rope, till the beholder grows dizzy in looking at them, is a very unhappy one for the animal concerned. During its progress the colt springs upward, across the circle, stops, flies over the turf with the velocity of a bird, and indulges in all sorts of graceful antics; but he always ends in one way—thanks to the knotted whipcord—in a level trot round the lunger with the regularity of a horizontal wheel, and in the loss for ever to his character of the bold contours which the fine hand of Nature gave it. Yet the process is considered to be the making of him.

Whether Somerset became permanently made under the action of the inevitable lunge, or whether he lapsed into mere dabbling with the artistic side of his profession only, it would be premature to say; but at any rate it was his contrite return to architecture as a calling that sent him on the sketching excursion under notice. Feeling that something still was wanting to round off his knowledge before he could take his professional line with confidence, he was led to remember that his own native Gothic was the one form of design that he had totally neglected from the beginning, through its having greeted him with wearisome iteration at the opening of his career. Now it had again returned to silence; in-

deed—such is the surprising instability of art 'principles' as they are facetiously called—it was just as likely as not to sink into the neglect and oblivion which had been its lot in Georgian times. This accident of being out of vogue lent English Gothic an additional charm to one of his proclivities; and away he went to make it the business of a summer circuit in the west.

The quiet time of evening, the secluded neighbourhood, the unusually gorgeous liveries of the clouds packed in a pile over that quarter of the heavens in which the sun had disappeared, were such as to make a traveller loiter on his walk. Coming to a stile, Somerset mounted himself on the top bar, to imbibe the spirit of the scene and hour. The evening was so still that every trifling sound could be heard for miles. There was the rattle of a returning waggon, mixed with the smacks of the waggoner's whip: the team must have been at least three miles off. From far over the hill came the faint periodic yell of kennelled hounds; while from the nearest village resounded the voices of boys at play in the twilight. Then a powerful clock struck the hour; it was not from the direction of the church, but rather from the wood behind him; and he thought it must be the clock of some mansion that way.

But the mind of man cannot always be forced to take up subjects by the pressure of their material presence, and Somerset's thoughts were often, to his great loss, apt to be even more than common truants from the tones and images that met his outer senses on walks and rides. He would sometimes go quietly through the queerest, gayest, most extraordinary town in Europe, and let it alone, provided it did not meddle with him by its beggars, beauties, innkeepers, police, coachmen, mongrels, bad smells, and such like obstructions. This feat of questionable utility he began performing now. Sitting on the three-inch ash rail that had been peeled

and polished like glass by the rubbings of all the small-clothes in the parish, he forgot the time, the place, forgot that it was August—in short, everything of the present altogether. His mind flew back to his past life, and deplored the waste of time that had resulted from his not having been able to make up his mind which of the many fashions of art that were coming and going in kaleidoscopic change was the true point of departure from himself. He had suffered from the modern malady of unlimited appreciativeness as much as any living man of his own age. Dozens of his fellows in years and experience, who had never thought specially of the matter, but had blunderingly applied themselves to whatever form of art confronted them at the moment of their making a move, were by this time acquiring renown as new lights; while he was still unknown. He wished that some accident could have hemmed in his eyes between inexorable blinkers, and sped him on in a channel ever so worn.

Thus balanced between believing and not believing in his own future, he was recalled to the scene without by hearing the notes of a familiar hymn, rising in subdued harmonies from a valley below. He listened more heedfully. It was his old friend the 'New Sabbath,' which he had never once heard since the lisping days of childhood, and whose existence, much as it had then been to him, he had till this moment quite forgotten. Where the 'New Sabbath' had kept itself all these years—why that sound and hearty melody had disappeared from all the cathedrals, parish churches, minsters and chapels-of-ease that he had been acquainted with during his apprenticeship to life, and until his ways had become irregular and uncongregational—he could not, at first, say. But then he recollected that the tune appertained to the old west-gallery period of church-music, anterior to the great choral reformation and the rule of Monk—that old time when

the repetition of a word, or half-line of a verse, was not considered a disgrace to an ecclesiastical choir.

Willing to be interested in anything which would keep him out-of-doors, Somerset dismounted from the stile and descended the hill before him, to learn whence the singing proceeded.

II

HE found that it had its origin in a building standing alone in a field; and though the evening was not yet dark without, lights shone from the windows. In a few moments Somerset stood before the edifice. Being just then *en rapport* with ecclesiasticism by reason of his recent occupation, he could not help murmuring, 'Shade of Pugin, what a monstrosity!'

Perhaps this exclamation (rather out of date since the discovery that Pugin himself often nodded amazingly) would not have been indulged in by Somerset but for his new architectural resolves, which caused professional opinions to advance themselves officiously to his lips whenever occasion offered. The building was, in short, a recently-erected chapel of red brick, with pseudo-classic ornamentation, and the white regular joints of mortar could be seen streaking its surface in geometrical oppressiveness from top to bottom. The roof was of blue slate, clean as a table, and unbroken from gable to gable; the windows were glazed with sheets of plate glass, a temporary iron stove-pipe passing out near one of these, and running up to the height of the ridge, where it was finished by a covering like a parachute. Walking round to the end, he perceived an oblong white stone let into the wall

just above the plinth, on which was inscribed in deep letters :—

Erected 187—,

AT THE SOLE EXPENSE OF

JOHN POWER, Esq., M.P.

The 'New Sabbath' still proceeded line by line, with all the emotional swells and cadences that had of old characterized the tune: and the body of vocal harmony that it evoked implied a large congregation within, to whom it was plainly as familiar as it had been to church-goers of a past generation. With a whimsical sense of regret at the secession of his once favourite air Somerset moved away, and would have quite withdrawn from the field had he not at that moment observed two young men with pitchers of water coming up from a stream hard by, and hastening with their burdens into the chapel vestry by a side door. Almost as soon as they had entered they emerged again with empty pitchers, and proceeded to the stream to fill them as before, an operation which they repeated several times. Somerset went forward to the stream, and waited till the young men came out again.

'You are carrying in a great deal of water,' he said, as each dipped his pitcher.

One of the young men modestly replied, 'Yes: we filled the cistern this morning; but it leaks, and requires a few pitcherfuls more.'

'Why do you do it?'

'There is to be a baptism, sir.'

Somerset was not sufficiently interested to develop a further conversation, and observing them in silence till they had again vanished into the building, he went on his way. Reaching the brow of the hill he stopped and looked back. The chapel was still in view, and the shades of night having deepened, the lights shone

from the windows yet more brightly than before. A few steps further would hide them and the edifice, and all that belonged to it from his sight, possibly for ever. There was something in the thought which led him to linger. The chapel had neither beauty, quaintness, nor congeniality to recommend it: the dissimilitude between the new utilitarianism of the place and the scenes of venerable Gothic art which had occupied his daylight hours could not well be exceeded. But Somerset, as has been said, was an instrument of no narrow gamut: he had a key for other touches than the purely æsthetic, even on such an excursion as this. His mind was arrested by the intense and busy energy which must needs belong to an assembly that required such a glare of light to do its religion by; in the heaving of that tune there was an earnestness which made him thoughtful, and the shine of those windows he had characterized as ugly reminded him of the shining of the good deed in a naughty world. The chapel and its shabby plot of ground, from which the herbage was all trodden away by busy feet, had a living human interest that the numerous minsters and churches knee-deep in fresh green grass, visited by him during the foregoing week, had often lacked. Moreover, there was going to be a baptism: that meant the immersion of a grown-up person; and he had been told that Baptists were serious people and that the scene was most impressive. What manner of man would it be who on an ordinary plodding and bustling evening of the nineteenth century could single himself out as one different from the rest of the inhabitants, banish all shyness, and come forward to undergo such a trying ceremony? Who was he that had pondered, gone into solitudes, wrestled with himself, worked up his courage and said, I will do this, though few else will, for I believe it to be my duty?

Whether on account of these thoughts, or from the circumstance that he had been alone amongst the tombs

all day without communion with his kind, he could not tell in after years (when he had good reason to think of the subject); but so it was that Somerset went back, and again stood under the chapel-wall.

Instead of entering he passed round to where the stove-chimney came through the bricks, and holding on to the iron stay he put his toes on the plinth and looked in at the window. The building was quite full of people belonging to that vast majority of society who are denied the art of articulating their higher emotions, and crave dumbly for a fugleman—respectably dressed working people, whose faces and forms were worn and contorted by years of dreary toil. On a platform at the end of the chapel a haggard man of more than middle age, with grey whiskers ascetically cut back from the fore part of his face so far as to be almost banished from the countenance, stood reading a chapter. Between the minister and the congregation was an open space, and in the floor of this was sunk a tank full of water, which just made its surface visible above the blackness of its depths by reflecting the lights overhead.

Somerset endeavoured to discover which one among the assemblage was to be the subject of the ceremony. But nobody appeared there who was at all out of the region of commonplace. The people were all quiet and settled; yet he could discern on their faces something more than attention, though it was less than excitement: perhaps it was expectation. And as if to bear out his surmise he heard at that moment the noise of wheels behind him.

His gaze into the lighted chapel made what had been an evening scene when he looked away from the landscape night itself on looking back; but he could see enough to discover that a brougham had driven up to the side-door used by the young water-bearers, and that a lady in white-and-black half-mourning was in the act of alighting, followed by what appeared to be a

waiting-woman carrying wraps. They entered the vestry-room of the chapel, and the door was shut. The service went on as before till at a certain moment the door between vestry and chapel was opened, when a woman came out clothed in an ample robe of flowing white, which descended to her feet. Somerset was unfortunate in his position; he could not see her face, but her gait suggested at once that she was the lady who had arrived just before. She was rather tall than otherwise, and the contour of her head and shoulders denoted a girl in the heyday of youth and activity. His imagination, stimulated by this beginning, set about filling in the meagre outline with most attractive details.

She stood upon the brink of the pool, and the minister descended the steps at its edge till the soles of his shoes were moistened with the water. He turned to the young candidate, but she did not follow him: instead of doing so she remained rigid as a stone. He stretched out his hand, but she still showed reluctance, till, with some embarrassment, he went back, and spoke softly in her ear.

She approached the edge, looked into the water, and turned away shaking her head. Somerset could for the first time see her face. Though humanly imperfect, as is every face we see, it was one which made him think that the best in woman-kind no less than the best in psalm-tunes had gone over to the Dissenters. He had certainly seen nobody so interesting in his tour hitherto; she was about twenty or twenty-one—perhaps twenty-three, for years have a way of stealing marches even upon beauty's anointed. The total dissimilarity between the expression of her lineaments and that of the countenances around her was not a little surprising, and was productive of hypotheses without measure as to how she came there. She was, in fact, emphatically a modern type of maidenhood, and she looked ultra-modern by reason of her environment: a presumably sophisticated

being among the simple ones—not wickedly so, but one who knew life fairly well for her age. Her hair, of good English brown, neither light nor dark, was abundant—too abundant for convenience in tying, as it seemed; and it threw off the lamp-light in a hazy lustre. And though it could not be said of her features that this or that was flawless, the nameless charm of them altogether was only another instance of how beautiful a woman can be as a whole without attaining in any one detail to the lines marked out as absolutely correct. The spirit and the life were there: and material shapes could be disregarded.

Whatever moral characteristics this might be the surface of, enough was shown to assure Somerset that she had some experience of things far removed from her present circumscribed horizon, and could live, and was even at that moment living, a clandestine, stealthy inner life which had very little to do with her outward one. The repression of nearly every external sign of that distress under which Somerset knew, by a sudden intuitive sympathy, that she was labouring, added strength to these convictions.

'And you refuse?' said the astonished minister, as she still stood immovable on the brink of the pool. He persuasively took her sleeve between his finger and thumb as if to draw her; but she resented this by a quick movement of displeasure, and he released her, seeing that he had gone too far.

'But, my dear lady,' he said, 'you promised! Consider your profession, and that you stand in the eyes of the whole church as an exemplar of your faith.'

'I cannot do it!'

'But your father's memory, miss; his last dying request!'

'I cannot help it,' she said, turning to get away.

'You came here with the intention to fulfil the Word?'

'But I was mistaken.'

'Then why did you come?'

She tacitly implied that to be a question she did not care to answer. 'Please say no more to me,' she murmured, and hastened to withdraw.

During this unexpected dialogue (which had reached Somerset's ears through the open windows) that young man's feelings had flown hither and thither between minister and lady in a most capricious manner: it had seemed at one moment a rather uncivil thing of her, charming as she was, to give the minister and the water-bearers so much trouble for nothing; the next, it seemed like reviving the ancient cruelties of the ducking-stool to try to force a girl into that dark water if she had not a mind to it. But the minister was not without insight, and he had seen that it would be useless to say more. The crestfallen old man had to turn round upon the congregation and declare officially that the baptism was postponed.

She passed through the door into the vestry. During the exciting moments of her recusancy there had been a perceptible flutter among the sensitive members of the congregation; nervous Dissenters seeming to be at one with nervous Episcopalians in this at least, that they heartily disliked a scene during service. Calm was restored to their minds by the minister starting a rather long hymn in minims and semibreves, amid the singing of which he ascended the pulpit. His face had a severe and even denunciatory look as he gave out his text, and Somerset began to understand that this meant mischief to the young person who had caused the hitch.

'In the third chapter of Revelation and the fifteenth and following verses, you will find these words:—

'"*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. . . . Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased*

with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."'

The sermon straightway began, and it was soon apparent that the commentary was to be no less forcible than the text. It was also apparent that the words were, virtually, not directed forward in the line in which they were uttered, but through the chink of the vestry-door, that had stood slightly ajar since the exit of the young lady. The listeners appeared to feel this no less than Somerset did, for their eyes, one and all, became fixed upon that vestry door as if they would almost push it open by the force of their gazing. The preacher's heart was full and bitter; no book or note was wanted by him; never was spontaneity more absolute than here. It was no timid reproof of the ornamental kind, but a direct denunciation, all the more vigorous perhaps from the limitation of mind and language under which the speaker laboured. Yet, fool that he had been made by the candidate, there was nothing acrid in his attack. Genuine flashes of rhetorical fire were occasionally struck by that plain and simple man, who knew what straightforward conduct was, and who did not know the illimitable caprice of a woman's mind.

At this moment there was not in the whole chapel a person whose imagination was not centred on what was invisibly taking place within the vestry. The thunder of the minister's eloquence echoed, of course, through the weak sister's cavern of retreat no less than round the public assembly. What she was doing inside there —whether listening contritely, or haughtily hastening to put on her things and get away from the chapel and all it contained—was obviously the thought of each member. What changes were tracing themselves upon that lovely face: did it rise to phases of Raffaelesque resignation or sink so low as to flush and frown? was Somerset's inquiry; and a half-explanation occurred when, during

the discourse, the door which had been ajar was gently pushed to.

Looking on as a stranger it seemed to him more than probable that this young woman's power of persistence in her unexpected repugnance to the rite was strengthened by wealth and position of some sort, and was not the unassisted gift of nature. The manner of her arrival, and her dignified bearing before the assembly, strengthened the belief. A woman who did not feel something extraneous to her mental self to fall back upon would be so far overawed by the people and the crisis as not to retain sufficient resolution for a change of mind.

The sermon ended, the minister wiped his steaming face and turned down his cuffs, and nods and sagacious glances went round. Yet many, even of those who had presumably passed the same ordeal with credit, exhibited gentler judgment than the preacher's on a tergiversation of which they had probably recognized some germ in their own bosoms when in the lady's situation.

For Somerset there was but one scene: the imagined scene of the girl herself as she sat alone in the vestry. The fervent congregation rose to sing again, and then Somerset heard a slight noise on his left hand which caused him to turn his head. The brougham, which had retired into the field to wait, was back again at the door: the subject of his rumination came out from the chapel—not in her mystic robe of white, but dressed in ordinary fashionable costume—followed as before by the attendant with other articles of clothing on her arm, including the white gown. Somerset fancied that the younger woman was drying her eyes with her handkerchief, but there was not much time to see: they quickly entered the carriage, and it moved on. Then a cat suddenly mewed, and he saw a white Persian standing forlorn where the carriage had been. The door was opened, the cat taken in, and the carriage drove away.

The stranger's girlish form stamped itself deeply on Somerset's soul. He strolled on his way quite oblivious to the fact that the moon had just risen, and that the landscape was one for him to linger over, especially if there were any Gothic architecture in the line of the lunar rays. The inference was that though this girl must be of a serious turn of mind, wilfulness was not foreign to her composition: and it was probable that her daily doings evinced without much abatement by religion the unbroken spirit and pride of life natural to her age.

The little village inn at which Somerset intended to pass the night lay a mile further on, and retracing his way up to the stile he rambled along the lane, now beginning to be streaked like a zebra with the shadows of some young trees that edged the road. But his attention was attracted to the other side of the way by a hum as of a night-bee, which arose from the play of the breezes over a single wire of telegraph running parallel with his track on tall poles that had appeared by the road, he hardly knew when, from a branch route, probably leading from some town in the neighbourhood to the village he was approaching. He did not know the population of Sleeping-Green, as the village of his search was called, but the presence of this mark of civilization seemed to signify that its inhabitants were not quite so far in the rear of their age as might be imagined; a glance at the still ungrassed heap of earth round the foot of each post was, however, sufficient to show that it was at no very remote period that they had made their advance.

Aided by this friendly wire Somerset had no difficulty in keeping his course, till he reached a point in the ascent of a hill at which the telegraph branched off from the road, passing through an opening in the hedge, to strike across an undulating down, while the road wound round to the left. For a few moments Somerset doubted

and stood still. The wire sang on overhead with dying falls and melodious rises that invited him to follow; while above the wire rode the stars in their courses, the low nocturn of the former seeming to be the voices of those stars,

'Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim.'

Recalling himself from these reflections Somerset decided to follow the lead of the wire. It was not the first time during his present tour that he had found his way at night by the help of these musical threads which the post-office authorities had erected all over the country for quite another purpose than to guide belated travellers. Plunging with it across the down he came to a hedgeless road that entered a park or chase, which flourished in all its original wildness. Tufts of rushes and brakes of fern rose from the hollows, and the road was in places half overgrown with green, as if it had not been tended for many years; so much so that, where shaded by trees, he found some difficulty in keeping it. Though he had noticed the remains of a deer-fence further back no deer were visible, and it was scarcely possible that there should be any in the existing state of things: but rabbits were multitudinous, every hillock being dotted with their seated figures till Somerset approached and sent them limping into their burrows. The road next wound round a clump of underwood beside which lay heaps of faggots for burning, and then there appeared against the sky the walls and towers of a castle, half ruin, half residence, standing on an eminence hard by.

Somerset stopped to examine it. The castle was not exceptionally large, but it had all the characteristics of its most important fellows. Irregular, dilapidated, and muffled in creepers as a great portion of it was, some part —a comparatively modern wing—was inhabited, for a

light or two steadily gleamed from some upper windows; in others a reflection of the moon denoted that unbroken glass yet filled their casements. Over all rose the keep, a square solid tower apparently not much injured by wars or weather, and darkened with ivy on one side, wherein wings could be heard flapping uncertainly, as if they belonged to a bird unable to find a proper perch. Hissing noises supervened, and then a hoot, proclaiming that a brood of young owls were residing there in the company of older ones. In spite of the habitable and more modern wing, neglect and decay had set their mark upon the outworks of the pile, unfitting them for a more positive light than that of the present hour.

He walked up to a modern arch spanning the ditch —now dry and green—over which the drawbridge once had swung. The large door under the porter's archway was closed and locked. While standing here the singing of the wire, which for the last few minutes he had quite forgotten, again struck upon his ear, and retreating to a convenient place he observed its final course: from the poles amid the trees it leaped across the moat, over the girdling wall, and thence by a tremendous stretch towards the keep where, to judge by sound, it vanished through an arrow-slit into the interior. This fossil of feudalism, then, was the journey's-end of the wire, and not the village of Sleeping-Green.

There was a certain unexpectedness in the fact that the hoary memorial of a stolid antagonism to the interchange of ideas, the monument of hard distinctions in blood and race, of deadly mistrust of one's neighbour in spite of the Church's teaching, and of a sublime unconsciousness of any other force than a brute one, should be the goal of a machine which beyond everything may be said to symbolize cosmopolitan views and the intellectual and moral kinship of all mankind. In that light the little buzzing wire had a far finer significance to the student Somerset than the vast walls which neighboured

it. But the modern fever and fret which consumes people before they can grow old was also signified by the wire; and this aspect of to-day did not contrast well with the fairer side of feudalism—leisure, light-hearted generosity, intense friendships, hawks, hounds, revels, healthy complexions, freedom from care, and such a living power in architectural art as the world may never again see.

Somerset withdrew till neither the singing of the wire nor the hisses of the irritable owls could be heard any more. A clock in the castle struck ten, and he recognized the strokes as those he had heard when sitting on the stile. It was indispensable that he should retrace his steps and push on to Sleeping-Green if he wished that night to reach his lodgings, which had been secured by letter at a little inn in the straggling line of roadside houses called by the above name, where his luggage had by this time probably arrived. In a quarter of an hour he was again at the point where the wire left the road, and following the highway over a hill he saw the hamlet at his feet.

III

By half-past ten the next morning Somerset was once more approaching the precincts of the building which had interested him the night before. Referring to his map he had learnt that it bore the name of Stancy Castle or Castle de Stancy; and he had been at once struck with its familiarity, though he had never understood its position in the county, believing it further to the west. If report spoke truly there was some excellent vaulting in the interior, and a change of study from ecclesiastical to secular Gothic was not unwelcome for a while.

The entrance-gate was open now, and under the archway the outer ward was visible, a great part of it being laid out as a flower-garden. This was in process of clearing from weeds and rubbish by a set of gardeners, and the soil was so encumbered that in rooting out the weeds such few hardy flowers as still remained in the beds were mostly brought up with them. The groove wherein the portcullis had run was as fresh as if only cut yesterday, the very tooling of the stone being visible. Close to this hung a bell-pull formed of a large wooden acorn attached to a vertical rod. Somerset's application brought a woman from the porter's door, who informed him that the day before having been the weekly show-day for visitors, it was doubtful if he could be admitted now.

'Who is at home?' said Somerset.

'Only Miss de Stancy,' the porteress replied.

His dread of being considered an intruder was such that he thought at first there was no help for it but to wait till the next week. But he had already through his want of effrontery lost a sight of many interiors, whose exhibition would have been rather a satisfaction to the inmates than a trouble. It was inconvenient to wait; he knew nobody in the neighbourhood from whom he could get an introductory letter: he turned and passed the woman, crossed the ward where the gardeners were at work, over a second and smaller bridge, and up a flight of stone stairs, open to the sky, along whose steps sunburnt Tudor soldiers and other renowned dead men had doubtless many times walked. It led to the principal door on this side. Thence he could observe the walls of the lower court in detail, and the old mosses with which they were padded—mosses that from time immemorial had been burnt brown every summer, and every winter had grown green again. The arrow-slit and the electric wire that entered it, like a worm uneasy at being unearthed, were distinctly visible now. So also was the clock, not, as he had supposed, a chronometer coeval with the fortress itself, but new and shining, and bearing the name of a recent maker.

The door was opened by a bland, intensely shaven man out of livery, who took Somerset's name and politely worded request to be allowed to inspect the architecture of the more public portions of the castle. He pronounced the word 'architecture' in the tone of a man who knew and practised that art; 'for,' he said to himself, 'if she thinks I am a mere idle tourist, it will not be so well.'

No such uncomfortable consequences ensued. Miss De Stancy had great pleasure in giving Mr. Somerset full permission to walk through whatever parts of the building he chose.

He followed the butler into the inner buildings of the fortress, the ponderous thickness of whose walls made itself felt like a physical pressure. An internal stone staircase, ranged round four sides of a square, was next revealed, leading at the top of one flight into a spacious hall, which seemed to occupy the whole area of the keep. From this apartment a corridor floored with black oak led to the more modern wing, where light and air were treated in a less gingerly fashion.

Here passages were broader than in the oldest portion, and upholstery enlisted in the service of the fine arts hid to a great extent the coldness of the walls.

Somerset was now left to himself, and roving freely from room to room he found time to inspect the different objects of interest that abounded there. Not all the chambers, even of the habitable division, were in use as dwelling-rooms, though these were still numerous enough for the wants of an ordinary country family. In a long gallery with a coved ceiling of arabesques which had once been gilded, hung a series of paintings representing the past personages of the De Stancy line. It was a remarkable array—even more so on account of the incredibly neglected condition of the canvases than for the artistic peculiarities they exhibited. Many of the frames were dropping apart at their angles, and some of the canvas was so dingy that the face of the person depicted was only distinguishable as the moon through mist. For the colour they had now they might have been painted during an eclipse; while, to judge by the webs tying them to the wall, the spiders that ran up and down their backs were such as to make the fair originals shudder in their graves.

He wondered how many of the lofty foreheads and smiling lips of this pictorial pedigree could be credited as true reflections of their prototypes. Some were wilfully false, no doubt; many more so by unavoidable accident and want of skill. Somerset felt that it re-

quired a profounder mind than his to disinter from the lumber of conventionality the lineaments that really sat in the painter's presence, and to discover their history behind the curtain of mere tradition.

The painters of this long collection were those who usually appear in such places; Holbein, Jansen, and Vandyck; Sir Peter, Sir Geoffrey, Sir Joshua, and Sir Thomas. Their sitters, too, had mostly been sirs; Sir William, Sir John, or Sir George De Stancy—some undoubtedly having a nobility stamped upon them beyond that conferred by their robes and orders; and others not so fortunate. Their respective ladies hung by their sides—feeble and watery, or fat and comfortable, as the case might be; also their fathers and mothers-in-law, their brothers and remoter relatives; their contemporary reigning princes, and their intimate friends. Of the De Stancys pure there ran through the collection a mark by which they might surely have been recognized as members of one family; this feature being the upper part of the nose. Every one, even if lacking other points in common, had the special indent at this point in the face—sometimes moderate in degree, sometimes excessive.

While looking at the pictures—which, though not in his regular line of study, interested Somerset more than the architecture, because of their singular dilapidation, it occurred to his mind that he had in his youth been schoolfellow for a very short time with a pleasant boy bearing a surname attached to one of the paintings—the name of Ravensbury. The boy had vanished he knew not how—he thought he had been removed from school suddenly on account of ill health. But the recollection was vague, and Somerset moved on to the rooms above and below. In addition to the architectural details of which he had as yet obtained but glimpses, there was a great collection of old movables and other domestic art-work—all more than a century

old, and mostly lying as lumber. There were suites of tapestry hangings, common and fine; green and scarlet leather-work, on which the gilding was still but little injured; venerable damask curtains; quilted silk table-covers, ebony cabinets, worked satin window-cushions, carved bedsteads, and embroidered bed-furniture which had apparently screened no sleeper for these many years. Downstairs there was also an interesting collection of armour, together with several huge trunks and coffers. A great many of them had been recently taken out and cleaned, as if a long dormant interest in them were suddenly revived. Doubtless they were those which had been used by the living originals of the phantoms that looked down from the frames.

This excellent hoard of suggestive designs for wood-work, metal-work, and work of other sorts, induced Somerset to divert his studies from the ecclesiastical direction, to acquire some new ideas from the objects here for domestic application. Yet for the present he was inclined to keep his sketch-book closed and his ivory rule folded, and devote himself to a general survey. Emerging from the ground-floor by a small doorway, he found himself on a terrace to the north-east, and on the other side than that by which he had entered. It was bounded by a parapet breast high, over which a view of the distant country met the eye, stretching from the foot of the slope to a distance of many miles. Somerset went and leaned over, and looked down upon the tops of the bushes beneath. The prospect included the village he had passed through on the previous day: and amidst the green lights and shades of the meadows he could discern the red brick chapel whose recalcitrant inmate had so engrossed him.

Before his attention had long strayed over the incident which romanticized that utilitarian structure, he became aware that he was not the only person who was looking from the terrace towards that point of the com-

pass. At the right-hand corner, in a niche of the curtain-wall, reclined a girlish shape; and asleep on the bench over which she leaned was a white cat—the identical Persian as it seemed—that had been taken into the carriage at the chapel-door.

Somerset began to muse on the probability or otherwise of the backsliding Baptist and this young lady resulting in one and the same person; and almost without knowing it he found himself deeply hoping for such a unity. The object of his inspection was idly leaning, and this somewhat disguised her figure. It might have been tall or short, curvilinear or angular. She carried a light sunshade which she fitfully twirled until, thrusting it back over her shoulder, her head was revealed sufficiently to show that she wore no hat or bonnet. This token of her being an inmate of the castle, and not a visitor, rather damped his expectations: but he persisted in believing her look towards the chapel must have a meaning in it, till she suddenly stood erect, and revealed herself as short in stature—almost dumpy—at the same time giving him a distinct view of her profile. She was not at all like the heroine of the chapel. He saw the dinted nose of the De Stancys outlined with Holbein shadowlessness against the blue-green of the distant wood. It was not the De Stancy face with all its original specialities: it was, so to speak, a defective reprint of that face: for the nose tried hard to turn up and deal utter confusion to the family shape.

As for the rest of the countenance, Somerset was obliged to own that it was not beautiful: Nature had done there many things that she ought not to have done, and left undone much that she should have executed. It would have been decidedly plain but for a precious quality which no perfection of chiselling can give when the temperament denies it, and which no facial irregularity can take away—a tender affectionateness which might almost be called yearning; such as

is often seen in the women of Correggio when they are painted in profile. But the plain features of Miss De Stancy—who she undoubtedly was—were rather severely handled by Somerset's judgment owing to his impression of the previous night. A beauty of a sort would have been lent by the flexuous contours of the mobile parts but for that unfortunate condition the poor girl was burdened with, of having to hand on a traditional feature with which she did not find herself otherwise in harmony.

She glanced at him for a moment, and showed by an imperceptible movement that he had made his presence felt. Not to embarrass her Somerset hastened to withdraw, at the same time that she passed round to the other part of the terrace, followed by the cat, in whom Somerset could imagine a certain denominational cast of countenance, notwithstanding her company. But as white cats are much alike each other at a distance, it was reasonable to suppose this creature was not the same one as that possessed by the beauty.

IV

HE descended the stone stairs to a lower story of the castle, in which was a crypt-like hall covered by vaulting of exceptional and massive ingenuity:

> 'Built ere the art was known,
> By pointed aisle and shafted stalk
> The arcades of an alleyed walk
> To emulate in stone.'

It happened that the central pillar whereon the vaults rested, reputed to exhibit some of the most hideous grotesques in England upon its capital, was within a locked door. Somerset was tempted to ask a servant for permission to open it, till he heard that the inner room was temporarily used for plate, the key being kept by Miss De Stancy, at which he said no more. But afterwards the active housemaid redescended the stone steps; she entered the crypt with a bunch of keys in one hand, and in the other a candle, followed by the young lady whom Somerset had seen on the terrace.

'I shall be very glad to unlock anything you may want to see. So few people take any real interest in what is here that we do not leave it open.'

Somerset expressed his thanks.

Miss De Stancy, a little to his surprise, had a touch of rusticity in her manner, and that forced absence of

reserve which seclusion from society lends to young women more frequently than not. She seemed glad to have something to do; the arrival of Somerset was plainly an event sufficient to set some little mark upon her day. Deception had been written on the faces of those frowning walls in their implying the insignificance of Somerset, when he found them tenanted only by this little woman whose life was narrower than his own.

'We have not been here long,' continued Miss De Stancy, 'and that's why everything is in such a dilapidated and confused condition.'

Somerset entered the dark store-closet, thinking less of the ancient pillar revealed by the light of the candle than what a singular remark the latter was to come from a member of the family which appeared to have been there five centuries. He held the candle above his head, and walked round, and presently Miss De Stancy came back.

'There is another vault below,' she said, with the severe face of a young woman who speaks only because it is absolutely necessary. 'Perhaps you are not aware of it? It was the dungeon: if you wish to go down there too, the servant will show you the way. It is not at all ornamental: rough, unhewn arches and clumsy piers.'

Somerset thanked her, and would perhaps take advantage of her kind offer when he had examined the spot where he was, if it were not causing inconvenience.

'No; I am sure Paula will be glad to know that anybody thinks it interesting to go down there—which is more than she does herself.'

Some obvious inquiries were suggested by this, but Somerset said, 'I have seen the pictures, and have been much struck by them; partly,' he added, with some hesitation, 'because one or two of them reminded me of a schoolfellow—I think his name was John Ravensbury?'

'Yes,' she said, almost eagerly. 'He was my cousin!'

'So that we are not quite strangers?'

'But he is dead now. . . . He was unfortunate: he was mostly spoken of as "that unlucky boy." . . . You know, I suppose, Mr. Somerset, why the paintings are in such a decaying state!—it is owing to the peculiar treatment of the castle during Mr. Wilkins's time. He was blind; so one can imagine he did not appreciate such things as there are here.'

'The castle has been shut up, you mean?'

'O yes, for many years. But it will not be so again. We are going to have the pictures cleaned, and the frames mended, and the old pieces of furniture put in their proper places. It will be very nice then. Did you see those in the east closet?'

'I have only seen those in the gallery.'

'I will just show you the way to the others, if you would like to see them?'

They ascended to the room designated the east closet. The paintings here, mostly of smaller size, were in a better condition, owing to the fact that they were hung on an inner wall, and had hence been kept free from damp. Somerset inquired the names and histories of one or two.

'I really don't quite know,' Miss De Stancy replied after some thought. 'But Paula knows, I am sure. I don't study them much—I don't see the use of it.' She swung her sunshade, so that it fell open, and turned it up till it fell shut. 'I have never been able to give much attention to ancestors,' she added, with her eyes on the parasol.

'These *are* your ancestors?' he asked, for her position and tone were matters which perplexed him. In spite of the family likeness and other details he could scarcely believe this frank and communicative country maiden to be the modern representative of the De Stancys.

'O yes, they certainly are,' she said, laughing. 'People say I am like them: I don't know if I am—well, yes, I know I am: I can see that, of course, any day. But they have gone from my family, and perhaps it is just as well that they should have gone. . . . They are useless,' she added, with serene conclusiveness.

'Ah! they have gone, have they?'

'Yes, castle and furniture went together: it was long ago—long before I was born. It doesn't seem to me as if the place ever belonged to a relative of mine.'

Somerset corrected his smiling manner to one of solicitude.

'But you live here, Miss De Stancy?'

'Yes—a great deal now; though sometimes I go home to sleep.'

'This is home to you, and not home?'

'I live here with Paula—my friend: I have not been here long, neither has she. For the first six months after her father's death she did not come here at all.'

They walked on, gazing at the walls, till the young man said: 'I fear I may be making some mistake: but I am sure you will pardon my inquisitiveness this once. *Who is* Paula?'

'Ah, you don't know! Of course you don't—local changes don't get talked of far away. She is the owner of this castle and estate. My father sold it when he was quite a young man, years before I was born, and not long after his father's death. It was purchased by a man named Wilkins, a rich man who became blind soon after he had bought it, and never lived here; so it was left uncared for.'

She went out upon the terrace; and without exactly knowing why, Somerset followed.

'Your friend——'

'Has only come here quite recently. She is away from home to-day. . . . It was very sad,' murmured

the young girl thoughtfully. 'No sooner had Mr. Power bought it of the representatives of Mr. Wilkins —almost immediately indeed—than he died from a chill caught after a warm bath. On account of that she did not take possession for several months; and even now she has only had a few rooms prepared as a temporary residence till she can think what to do. Poor thing, it is sad to be left alone!'

Somerset heedfully remarked that he thought he recognized that name Power, as one he had seen lately, somewhere or other.

'Perhaps you have been hearing of her father. Do you know what he was?'

Somerset did not.

She looked across the distant country, where undulations of dark-green foliage formed a prospect extending for miles. And as she watched, and Somerset's eyes, led by hers, watched also, a white streak of steam, thin as a cotton thread, could be discerned ploughing that green expanse. 'Her father made *that*,' Miss De Stancy said, directing her finger towards the object.

'That what?'

'That railway. He was Mr. John Power, the great railway contractor. And it was through making the railway that he discovered this castle—the railway was diverted a little on its account.'

'A clash between ancient and modern.'

'Yes, but he took an interest in the locality long before he purchased the estate. And he built the people a chapel on a bit of freehold he bought for them. He was a great Nonconformist, a staunch Baptist up to the day of his death—a much stauncher one,' she said significantly, 'than his daughter is.'

'Ah, I begin to spot her!'

'You have heard about the baptism?'

'I know something of it.'

'Her conduct has given mortal offence to the scattered

people of the denomination that her father was at such pains to unite into a body.'

Somerset could guess the remainder, and in thinking over the circumstances did not state what he had seen. She added, as if disappointed at his want of curiosity—

'She would not submit to the rite when it came to the point. The water looked so cold and dark and fearful, she said, that she could not do it to save her life.'

'Surely she should have known her mind before she had gone so far?' Somerset's words had a condemnatory form, but perhaps his actual feeling was that if Miss Power had known her own mind, she would have not interested him half so much.

'Paula's own mind had nothing to do with it!' said Miss De Stancy, warming up to staunch partizanship in a moment. 'It was all undertaken by her from a mistaken sense of duty. It was her father's dying wish that she should make public profession of her—what do you call it—of the denomination she belonged to, as soon as she felt herself fit to do it: so when he was dead she tried and tried, and didn't get any more fit; and at last she screwed herself up to the pitch, and thought she must undergo the ceremony out of pure reverence for his memory. It was very short-sighted of her father to put her in such a position: because she is now very sad, as she feels she can never try again after such a sermon as was delivered against her.'

Somerset presumed that Miss Power need not have heard this Knox or Bossuet of hers if she had chosen to go away?

'She did not hear it in the face of the congregation; but from the vestry. She told me some of it when she reached home. Would you believe it, the man who preached so bitterly is a tenant of hers? I said, 'Surely you will turn him out of his house?'—But she answered, in her calm, deep, nice way, that she supposed he had a

perfect right to preach against her, that she could not in justice molest him at all. I wouldn't let him stay if the house were mine. But she has often before allowed him to scold her from the pulpit in a smaller way—once it was about an expensive dress she had worn—not mentioning her by name, you know; but all the people are quite aware that it is meant for her, because only one person of her wealth or position belongs to the Baptist body in this county.'

Somerset was looking at the homely affectionate face of the little speaker. 'You are her good friend, I am sure,' he remarked.

She looked into the distant air with tacit admission of the impeachment. 'So would you be if you knew her,' she said; and a blush slowly rose to her cheek, as if the person spoken of had been a lover rather than a friend.

'But you are not a Baptist any more than I?' continued Somerset.

'O no. And I never knew one till I knew Paula. I think they are very nice; though I sometimes wish Paula was not one, but the religion of reasonable persons.'

They walked on, and came opposite to where the telegraph emerged from the trees, leapt over the parapet, and up through the loophole into the interior.

'That looks strange in such a building,' said her companion.

'Miss Power had it put up to know the latest news from town. It costs six pounds a mile. She can work it herself, beautifully: and so can I, but not so well. It was a great delight to learn. Miss Power was so interested at first that she was sending messages from morning till night. And did you hear the new clock?'

'Is it a new one?—Yes, I heard it.'

'The old one was quite worn out; so Paula has put it in the cellar, and had this new one made, though it

still strikes on the old bell. It tells the seconds, but the old one, which my very great grandfather erected in the eighteenth century, only told the hours. Paula says that time, being so much more valuable now, must of course be cut up into smaller pieces.'

'She does not appear to be much impressed by the spirit of this ancient pile.'

Miss De Stancy shook her head too slightly to express absolute negation.

'Do you wish to come through this door?' she asked. 'There is a singular chimney-piece in the kitchen, which is considered a unique example of its kind, though I myself don't know enough about it to have an opinion on the subject.'

When they had looked at the corbelled chimney-piece they returned to the hall, where his eye was caught anew by a large map that he had conned for some time when alone, without being able to divine the locality represented. It was called 'General Plan of the Town,' and showed streets and open spaces corresponding with nothing he had seen in the county.

'Is that town here?' he asked.

'It is not anywhere but in Paula's brain; she has laid it out from her own design. The site is supposed to be near our railway station, just across there, where the land belongs to her. She is going to grant cheap building leases, and develop the manufacture of pottery.'

'Pottery—how very practical she must be!'

'O no! no!' replied Miss De Stancy, in tones showing how supremely ignorant he must be of Miss Power's nature if he characterized her in those terms. 'It is *Greek* pottery she means—Hellenic pottery she tells me to call it, only I forget. There is beautiful clay at the place, her father told her: he found it in making the railway tunnel. She has visited the British Museum, continental museums, and Greece, and Spain: and hopes to imitate the old fictile work in time, especially

the Greek of the best period, four hundred years after Christ, or before Christ—I forget which it was Paula said. . . . O no, she is not practical in the sense you mean, at all.'

'A mixed young lady, rather.'

Miss De Stancy appeared unable to settle whether this new definition of her dear friend should be accepted as kindly, or disallowed as decidedly sarcastic. 'You would like her if you knew her,' she insisted, in half tones of pique; after which she walked on a few steps.

'I think very highly of her,' said Somerset.

'And I! And yet at one time I could never have believed that I should have been her friend. One is prejudiced at first against people who are reported to have such differences in feeling, associations, and habit, as she seemed to have from mine. But it has not stood in the least in the way of our liking each other. I believe the difference makes us the more united.'

'It says a great deal for the liberality of both,' answered Somerset warmly. 'Heaven send us more of the same sort of people! They are not too numerous at present.'

As this remark called for no reply from Miss De Stancy, she took advantage of an opportunity to leave him alone, first repeating her permission to him to wander where he would. He walked about for some time, sketch-book in hand, but was conscious that his interest did not lie much in the architecture. In passing along the corridor of an upper floor he observed an open door, through which was visible a room containing one of the finest Renaissance cabinets he had ever seen. It was impossible, on close examination, to do justice to it in a hasty sketch; it would be necessary to measure every line if he would bring away anything of utility to him as a designer. Deciding to reserve this gem for another opportunity he cast his eyes round the room and blushed a little. Without

knowing it he had intruded into the absent Miss Paula's own particular set of chambers, including a boudoir and sleeping apartment. On the tables of the sitting-room were most of the popular papers and periodicals that he knew, not only English, but from Paris, Italy, and America. Satirical prints, though they did not unduly preponderate, were not wanting. Besides these there were books from a London circulating library, paper-covered light literature in French and choice Italian, and the latest monthly reviews; while between the two windows stood the telegraph apparatus whose wire had been the means of bringing him hither.

These things, ensconced amid so much of the old and hoary, were as if a stray hour from the nineteenth century had wandered like a butterfly into the thirteenth, and lost itself there.

The door between this ante-chamber and the sleeping-room stood open. Without venturing to cross the threshold, for he felt that he would be abusing hospitality to go so far, Somerset looked in for a moment. It was a pretty place, and seemed to have been hastily fitted up. In a corner, overhung by a blue and white canopy of silk, was a little cot, hardly large enough to impress the character of bedroom upon the old place. Upon a counterpane lay a parasol and a silk neckerchief. On the other side of the room was a tall mirror of startling newness, draped like the bedstead, in blue and white. Thrown at random upon the floor was a pair of satin slippers that would have fitted Cinderella. A dressing-gown lay across a settee; and opposite, upon a small easy-chair in the same blue and white livery, were a Bible, the *Baptist Magazine*, Wardlaw on Infant Baptism, Walford's County Families, and the *Court Journal*. On and over the mantelpiece were nicknacks of various descriptions, and photographic portraits of the artistic, scientific, and literary celebrities of the day.

A dressing-room lay beyond; but, becoming con-

scious that his study of ancient architecture would hardly bear stretching further in that direction, Mr. Somerset retreated to the outside, obliviously passing by the gem of Renaissance that had led him in.

'She affects blue,' he was thinking. 'Then she is fair.'

On looking up, some time later, at the new clock that told the seconds, he found that the hours at his disposal for work had flown without his having transferred a single feature of the building or furniture to his sketch-book. Before leaving he sent in for permission to come again, and then walked across the fields to the inn at Sleeping-Green, reflecting less upon Miss De Stancy (so little force of presence had she possessed) than upon the modern flower in a mediæval flower-pot whom Miss De Stancy's information had brought before him, and upon the incongruities that were daily shaping themselves in the world under the great modern fluctuations of classes and creeds.

Somerset was still full of the subject when he arrived at the end of his walk, and he fancied that some loungers at the bar of the inn were discussing the heroine of the chapel-scene just at the moment of his entry. On this account, when the landlord came to clear away the dinner, Somerset was led to inquire of him, by way of opening a conversation, if there were many Baptists in the neighbourhood.

The landlord (who was a serious man on the surface, though he occasionally smiled beneath) replied that there were a great many—far more than the average in country parishes. 'Even here, in my house, now,' he added, 'when volks get a drop of drink into 'em, and their feelings rise to a zong, some man will strike up a hymn by preference. But I find no fault with that; for though 'tis hardly human nature to be so calculating in yer cups, a feller may as well sing to gain something as sing to waste.'

'How do you account for there being so many?'

'Well, you zee, sir, some says one thing, and some another; I think they does it to save the expense of a Christian burial for ther children. Now there's a poor family out in Long Lane—the husband used to smite for Jimmy More the blacksmith till 'a hurt his arm—they'd have no less than eleven children if they'd not been lucky t'other way, and buried five when they were three or four months old. Now every one of them children was given to the sexton in a little box that any journeyman could nail together in a quarter of an hour, and he buried 'em at night for a shilling a head; whereas 'twould have cost a couple of pounds each if they'd been christened at church. . . . Of course there's the new lady at the castle, she's a chapel member, and that may make a little difference; but she's not been here long enough to show whether 'twill be worth while to join 'em for the profit o't or whether 'twill not. No doubt if it turns out that she's of a sort to relieve volks in trouble, more will join her set than belongs to it already. "Any port in a storm," of course, as the saying is.'

'As for yourself, you are a Churchman at present, I presume?'

'Yes; not but I was a Methodist once—ay, for a length of time. 'Twas owing to my taking a house next door to a chapel; so that what with hearing the organ bizz like a bee through the wall, and what with finding it saved umbrellas on wet Zundays, I went over to that faith for two years—though I believe I dropped money by it—I wouldn't be the man to say so if I hadn't. Howsomever, when I moved into this house I turned back again to my old religion. Faith, I don't zee much difference: be you one, or be you t'other, you've got to get your living.'

'The De Stancys, of course, have not much influence here now, for that, or any other thing?'

'O no, no; not any at all. They be very low upon ground, and always will be now, I suppose. It was thoughted worthy of being recorded in history—you've read it, sir, no doubt?'

'Not a word.'

'O, then, you shall. I've got the history zomewhere. 'Twas gay manners that did it. The only bit of luck they have had of late years is Miss Power's taking to little Miss De Stancy, and making her her company-keeper. I hope 'twill continue.'

That the two daughters of these antipodean families should be such intimate friends was a situation which pleased Somerset as much as it did the landlord. It was an engaging instance of that human progress on which he had expended many charming dreams in the years when poetry, theology, and the reorganization of society had seemed matters of more importance to him than a profession which should help him to a big house and income, a fair Deïopeia, and a lovely progeny. When he was alone he poured out a glass of wine, and silently drank the healths of the two generous-minded young women who, in this lonely district, had found sweet communion a necessity of life, and by pure and instinctive good sense had broken down a barrier which men thrice their age and repute would probably have felt it imperative to maintain. But perhaps this was premature: the omnipotent Miss Power's character—practical or ideal, politic or impulsive—he as yet knew nothing of; and giving over reasoning from insufficient data he lapsed into mere conjecture.

V

THE next morning Somerset was again at the castle. He passed some interval on the walls before encountering Miss De Stancy, whom at last he observed going towards a pony-carriage that waited near the door.

A smile gained strength upon her face at his approach, and she was the first to speak. 'I am sorry Miss Power has not returned,' she said, and accounted for that lady's absence by her distress at the event of two evenings earlier.

'But I have driven over to my father's—Sir William De Stancy's—house this morning,' she went on. 'And on mentioning your name to him, I found he knew it quite well. You will, will you not, forgive my ignorance in having no better knowledge of the elder Mr. Somerset's works than a dim sense of his fame as a painter? But I was going to say that my father would much like to include you in his personal acquaintance, and wishes me to ask if you will give him the pleasure of lunching with him to-day. My cousin John, whom you once knew, was a great favourite of his, and used to speak of you sometimes. It will be so kind if you can come. My father is an old man, out of society, and he would be glad to hear the news of town.'

Somerset said he was glad to find himself among friends where he had only expected strangers; and

promised to come that day, if she would tell him the way.

That she could easily do. The short way was across that glade he saw there—then over the stile into the wood, following the path till it came out upon the turnpike-road. He would then be almost close to the house. The distance was about two miles and a half. But if he thought it too far for a walk, she would drive on to the town, where she had been going when he came, and instead of returning straight to her father's would come back and pick him up.

It was not at all necessary, he thought. He was a walker, and could find the path.

At this moment a servant came to tell Miss De Stancy that the telegraph was calling her.

'Ah—it is lucky that I was not gone again!' she exclaimed. 'John seldom reads it right if I am away.'

It now seemed quite in the ordinary course that, as a friend of her father's, he should accompany her to the instrument. So up they went together, and immediately on reaching it she applied her ear to the instrument, and began to gather the message. Somerset fancied himself like a person overlooking another's letter, and moved aside.

'It is no secret,' she said, smiling. '"*Paula to Charlotte*," it begins.'

'That's very pretty.'

'O—and it is about—you,' murmured Miss De Stancy.

'Me?' The architect blushed a little.

She made no answer, and the machine went on with its story. There was something curious in watching this utterance about himself, under his very nose, in language unintelligible to him. He conjectured whether it were inquiry, praise, or blame, with a sense that it might reasonably be the latter, as the result of his surreptitious

look into that blue bedroom, possibly observed and reported by some servant of the house.

'"*Direct that every facility be given to Mr. Somerset to visit any part of the castle he may wish to see. On my return I shall be glad to welcome him as the acquaintance of your relatives. I have two of his father's pictures.*"'

'Dear me, the plot thickens,' he said, as Miss De Stancy announced the words. 'How could she know about me?'

'I sent a message to her this morning when I saw you crossing the park on your way here—telling her that Mr. Somerset, son of the Academician, was making sketches of the castle, and that my father knew something of you. That's her answer.'

'Where are the pictures by my father that she has purchased?'

'O, not here—at least, not unpacked.'

Miss de Stancy then left him to proceed on her journey to Markton (so the nearest little town was called), informing him that she would be at her father's house to receive him at two o'clock.

Just about one he closed his sketch-book, and set out in the direction she had indicated. At the entrance to the wood a man was at work pulling down a rotten gate that bore on its battered lock the initials 'W. De S.' and erecting a new one whose ironmongery exhibited the letters 'P. P.'

The warmth of the summer noon did not inconveniently penetrate the dense masses of foliage which now began to overhang the path, except in spots where a ruthlesss timber-felling had taken place in previous years for the purpose of sale. It was that particular half-hour of the day in which the birds of the forest prefer walking to flying; and there being no wind, the hopping of the smallest songster over the dead leaves reached his ear from behind the undergrowth. The track had originally been a well-kept winding drive, but

a deep carpet of moss and leaves overlaid it now, though the general outline still remained to show that its curves had been set out with as much care as those of a lawn walk, and the gradient made easy for carriages where the natural slopes were great. Felled trunks occasionally lay across it, and alongside were the hollow and fungous boles of trees sawn down in long past years.

After a walk of three-quarters of an hour he came to another gate, where the letters 'P. P.' again supplanted the historical 'W. De S.' Climbing over this, he found himself on a highway which presently dipped down towards the town of Markton, a place he had never yet seen. It appeared in the distance as a quiet little borough of a few thousand inhabitants; and, without the town boundary on the side he was approaching, stood half-a-dozen genteel and modern houses, of the detached kind usually found in such suburbs. On inquiry, Sir William De Stancy's residence was indicated as one of these.

It was almost new, of streaked brick, having a central door, and a small bay window on each side to light the two front parlours. A little lawn spread its green surface in front, divided from the road by iron railings, the low line of shrubs immediately within them being coated with pallid dust from the highway. On the neat piers of the neat entrance gate were chiselled the words 'Myrtle Villa.' Genuine roadside respectability sat smiling on every brick of the eligible dwelling.

Perhaps that which impressed Somerset more than the mushroom modernism of Sir William De Stancy's house was the air of healthful cheerfulness which pervaded it. He was shown in by a neat maidservant in black gown and white apron, a canary singing a welcome from a cage in the shadow of the window, the voices of crowing cocks coming over the chimneys from somewhere behind, and the sun and air riddling the house everywhere.

A dwelling of those well-known and popular dimensions which allow the proceedings in the kitchen to be distinctly heard in the parlours, it was so planned that a raking view might be obtained through it from the front door to the end of the back garden. The drawing-room furniture was comfortable, in the walnut-and-green-rep style of some years ago. Somerset had expected to find his friends living in an old house with remnants of their own antique furniture, and he hardly knew whether he ought to meet them with a smile or a gaze of condolence. His doubt was terminated, however, by the cheerful and tripping entry of Miss De Stancy, who had returned from her drive to Markton; and in a few more moments Sir William came in from the garden.

He was an old man of tall and spare build, with a considerable stoop, his glasses dangling against his waistcoat-buttons, and the front corners of his coat-tails hanging lower than the hinderparts, so that they swayed right and left as he walked. He nervously apologized to his visitor for having kept him waiting.

'I am so glad to see you,' he said, with a mild benevolence of tone, as he retained Somerset's hand for a moment or two; 'partly for your father's sake, whom I met more than once in my younger days, before he became so well-known; and also because I learn that you were a friend of my poor nephew John Ravensbury.' He looked over his shoulder to see if his daughter were within hearing; and, with the impulse of the solitary to make a confidence, continued in a low tone: 'She, poor girl, was to have married John: his death was a sad blow to her and to all of us.—Pray take a seat, Mr. Somerset.'

The reverses of fortune which had brought Sir William De Stancy to this comfortable cottage awakened in Somerset a warmer emotion than curiosity, and he sat down with a heart as responsive to each speech uttered as if it had seriously concerned himself, while his host

gave some words of information to his daughter on the trifling events that had marked the morning just passed; such as that the cow had got out of the paddock into Miss Power's field, that the smith who had promised to come and look at the kitchen range had not arrived, that two wasps' nests had been discovered in the garden bank, and that Nick Jones's baby had fallen downstairs. Sir William had large cavernous arches to his eye-sockets, reminding the beholder of the vaults in the castle he once had owned. His hands were long and almost fleshless, each knuckle showing like a bamboo-joint from beneath his coat-sleeves, which were small at the elbow and large at the wrist. All the colour had gone from his beard and locks, except in the case of a few isolated hairs of the former, which retained dashes of their original shade at sudden points in their length, revealing that all had once been raven black.

But to study a man to his face for long is a species of ill-nature which requires a colder temperament, or at least an older heart, than the architect's was at that time. Incurious unobservance is the true attitude of cordiality, and Somerset blamed himself for having fallen into an act of inspection even briefly. He would wait for his host's conversation, which would doubtless be of the essence of historical romance.

'The favourable Bank-returns have made the money-market much easier to-day, as I learn?' said Sir William.

'O, have they?' said Somerset. 'Yes, I suppose they have.'

'And something is meant by this unusual quietness in Foreign stocks since the late remarkable fluctuations,' insisted the old man. 'Is the current of speculation quite arrested, or is it but a temporary lull?'

Somerset said he was afraid he could not give an opinion, and entered very lamely into the subject; but Sir William seemed to find sufficient interest in his own thoughts to do away with the necessity of acquiring

fresh impressions from other people's replies; for often after putting a question he looked on the floor, as if the subject were at an end. Lunch was now ready, and when they were in the dining-room Miss De Stancy, to introduce a topic of more general interest, asked Somerset if he had noticed the myrtle on the lawn?

Somerset had noticed it, and thought he had never seen such a full-blown one in the open air before. His eyes were, however, resting at the moment on the only objects at all out of the common that the dining-room contained. One was a singular glass case over the fireplace, within which were some large mediæval door-keys, black with rust and age; and the others were two full-length oil portraits in the costume of the end of the last century—so out of all proportion to the size of the room they occupied that they almost reached to the floor.

'Those originally belonged to the castle yonder,' said Miss De Stancy, or Charlotte, as her father called her, noticing Somerset's glance at the keys. 'They used to unlock the principal entrance-doors, which were knocked to pieces in the civil wars. New doors were placed afterwards, but the old keys were never given up, and have been preserved by us ever since.'

'They are quite useless—mere lumber—particularly to me,' said Sir William.

'And those huge paintings were a present from Paula,' she continued. 'They are portraits of my great-grandfather and mother. Paula would give all the old family pictures back to me if we had room for them; but they would fill the house to the ceilings.'

Sir William was impatient of the subject. 'What is the utility of such accumulations?' he asked. 'Their originals are but clay now—mere forgotten dust, not worthy a moment's inquiry or reflection at this distance of time. Nothing can retain the spirit, and why should we preserve the shadow of the form?—London has been very full this year, sir, I have been told?'

'It has,' said Somerset, and he asked if they had been up that season. It was plain that the matter with which Sir William De Stancy least cared to occupy himself before visitors was the history of his own family, in which he was followed with more simplicity by his daughter Charlotte.

'No,' said the baronet. 'One might be led to think there is a fatality which prevents it. We make arrangements to go to town almost every year, to meet some old friend who combines the rare conditions of being in London with being mindful of me; but he has always died or gone elsewhere before the event has taken place. . . . But with a disposition to be happy, it is neither this place nor the other that can render us the reverse. In short each man's happiness depends upon himself, and his ability for doing with little.' He turned more particularly to Somerset, and added with an impressive smile: 'I hope you cultivate the art of doing with little?'

Somerset said that he certainly did cultivate that art, partly because he was obliged to.

'Ah—you don't mean to the extent that I mean. The world has not yet learned the riches of frugality, says, I think, Cicero, somewhere; and nobody can testify to the truth of that remark better than I. If a man knows how to spend less than his income, however small that may be, why—he has the philosopher's stone.' And Sir William looked in Somerset's face with frugality written in every pore of his own, as much as to say, 'And here you see one who has been a living instance of those principles from his youth up.'

Somerset soon found that whatever turn the conversation took, Sir William invariably reverted to this topic of frugality. When luncheon was over he asked his visitor to walk with him into the garden, and no sooner were they alone than he continued: 'Well, Mr.

Somerset, you are down here sketching architecture for professional purposes. Nothing can be better: you are a young man, and your art is one in which there are innumerable chances.'

'I had begun to think they were rather few,' said Somerset.

'No, they are numerous enough: the difficulty is to find out where they lie. It is better to know where your luck lies than where your talent lies: that's an old man's opinion.'

'I'll remember it,' said Somerset.

'And now give me some account of your new clubs, new hotels, and new men. . . . What I was going to add, on the subject of finding out where your luck lies, is that nobody is so unfortunate as not to have a lucky star in some direction or other. Perhaps yours is at the antipodes; if so, go there. All I say is, discover your lucky star.'

'I am looking for it.'

'You may be able to do two things; one well, the other but indifferently, and yet you may have more luck in the latter. Then stick to that one, and never mind what you can do best. Your star lies there.'

'There I am not quite at one with you, Sir William.'

'You should be. Not that I mean to say that luck lies in any one place long, or at any one person's door. Fortune likes new faces, and your wisdom lies in bringing your acquisitions into safety while her favour lasts. To do that you must make friends in her time of smiles—make friends with people, wherever you find them. My daughter has unconsciously followed that maxim. She has struck up a warm friendship with our neighbour, Miss Power, at the castle. We are diametrically different from her in associations, traditions, ideas, religion—she comes of a violent dissenting family among other things—but I say to Charlotte what I say to you: win affection and regard wherever you can, and accommodate your-

self to the times. I put nothing in the way of their intimacy, and wisely so, for by this so many pleasant hours are added to the sum total vouchsafed to humanity.'

It was quite late in the afternoon when Somerset took his leave. Miss De Stancy did not return to the castle that night, and he walked through the wood as he had come, feeling that he had been talking with a man of simple nature, who flattered his own understanding by devising Machiavellian theories after the event, to account for any spontaneous action of himself or his daughter, which might otherwise seem eccentric or irregular.

Before Somerset reached the inn he was overtaken by a slight shower, and on entering the house he walked into the general room, where there was a fire, and stood with one foot on the fender. The landlord was talking to some guest who sat behind a screen; and, probably because Somerset had been seen passing the window, and was known to be sketching at the castle, the conversation turned on Sir William De Stancy.

'I have often noticed,' observed the landlord, 'that volks who have come to grief, and quite failed, have the rules how to succeed in life more at their vingers' ends than volks who have succeeded. I assure you that Sir William, so full as he is of wise maxims, never acted upon a wise maxim in his life, until he had lost everything, and it didn't matter whether he was wise or no. You know what he was in his young days, of course?'

'No, I don't,' said the invisible stranger.

'O, I thought everybody knew poor Sir William's history. He was the star, as I may zay, of good company forty years ago. I remember him in the height of his jinks, as I used to zee him when I was a very little boy, and think how great and wonderful he was. I can seem to zee now the exact style of his clothes; white hat, white trousers, white silk handkerchief; and

his jonnick face, as white as his clothes with keeping late hours. There was nothing black about him but his hair and his eyes—he wore no beard at that time—and they were black as slooes. The like of his coming on the race-course was never seen there afore nor since. He drove his ikkipage hisself; and it was always hauled by four beautiful white horses, and two outriders rode in harness bridles. There was a groom behind him, and another at the rubbing-post, all in livery as glorious as New Jerusalem. What a 'stablishment he kept up at that time! I can mind him, sir, with thirty race-horses in training at once, seventeen coach-horses, twelve hunters at his box t'other side of London, four chargers at Budmouth, and ever so many hacks.'

'And he lost all by his racing speculations?' the stranger observed; and Somerset fancied that the voice had in it something more than the languid carelessness of a casual sojourner.

'Partly by that, partly in other ways. He spent a mint o' money in a wild project of founding a watering-place; and sunk thousands in a useless silver mine; so 'twas no wonder that the castle named after him vell into other hands. . . . The way it was done was curious. Mr. Wilkins, who was the first owner after it went from Sir William, actually sat down as a guest at his table, and got up as the owner. He took off, at a round sum, everything saleable, furniture, plate, pictures, even the milk and butter in the dairy. That's how the pictures and furniture come to be in the castle still; wormeaten rubbish zome o' it, and hardly worth moving.'

'And off went the baronet to Myrtle Villa?'

'O no! he went away for many years. 'Tis quite lately, since his illness, that he came to that little place, in zight of the stone walls that were the pride of his forefathers.'

'From what I hear, he has not the manner of a broken-hearted man?'

'Not at all. Since that illness he has been happy, as you see him: no pride, quite calm and mild; at new moon quite childish. 'Tis that makes him able to live there; before he was so ill he couldn't bear a zight of the place, but since then he is happy nowhere else, and never leaves the parish further than to drive once a week to Markton. His head won't stand society nowadays, and he lives quite lonely as you zee, only zeeing his daughter, or his son whenever he comes home, which is not often. They say that if his brain hadn't softened a little he would ha' died—'twas that saved his life.'

'What's this I hear about his daughter? Is she really hired companion to the new owner?'

'Now that's a curious thing again, these two girls being so fond of one another; one of 'em a dissenter, and all that, and t'other a De Stancy. O no, not hired exactly, but she mostly lives with Miss Power, and goes about with her, and I dare say Miss Power makes it wo'th her while. One can't move a step without the other following; though judging by ordinary volks you'd think 'twould be a cat-and-dog friendship rather.'

'But 'tis not?'

''Tis not; they be more like lovers than maid and maid. Miss Power is looked up to by little De Stancy as if she were a god-a'mighty, and Miss Power lets her love her to her heart's content. But whether Miss Power loves back again I can't zay, for she's as deep as the North Star.'

The landlord here left the stranger to go to some other part of the house, and Somerset drew near to the glass partition to gain a glimpse of a man whose interest in the neighbourhood seemed to have arisen so simultaneously with his own. But the inner room was empty: the man had apparently departed by another door.

VI

THE telegraph had almost the attributes of a human being at Stancy Castle. When its bell rang people rushed to the old tapestried chamber allotted to it, and waited its pleasure with all the deference due to such a novel inhabitant of that ancestral pile. This happened on the following afternoon about four o'clock, while Somerset was sketching in the room adjoining that occupied by the instrument. Hearing its call, he looked in to learn if anybody were attending, and found Miss De Stancy bending over it.

She welcomed him without the least embarrassment. 'Another message,' she said.—'"*Paula to Charlotte.—Have returned to Markton. Am starting for home. Will be at the gate between four and five if possible.*"'

Miss De Stancy blushed with pleasure when she raised her eyes from the machine. 'Is she not thoughtful to let me know beforehand?'

Somerset said she certainly appeared to be, feeling at the same time that he was not in possession of sufficient data to make the opinion of great value.

'Now I must get everything ready, and order what she will want, as Mrs. Goodman is away. What will she want? Dinner would be best—she has had no lunch, I know; or tea perhaps, and dinner at the usual time. Still, if she has had no lunch—Hark, what do I hear?'

She ran to an arrow-slit, and Somerset, who had also heard something, looked out of an adjoining one. They could see from their elevated position a great way along the white road, stretching like a tape amid the green expanses on each side. There had arisen a cloud of dust, accompanied by a noise of wheels.

'It is she,' said Charlotte. 'O yes—it is past four —the telegram has been delayed.'

'How would she be likely to come?'

'She has doubtless hired a carraige at the inn: she said it would be useless to send to meet her, as she couldn't name a time. . . . Where is she now?'

'Just where the boughs of those beeches overhang the road—there she is again!'

Miss De Stancy went away to give directions, and Somerset continued to watch. The vehicle, which was of no great pretension, soon crossed the bridge and stopped: there was a ring at the bell; and Miss De Stancy reappeared.

'Did you see her as she drove up—is she not interesting?'

'I could not see her.'

'Ah, no—of course you could not from this window because of the trees. Mr. Somerset, will you come downstairs? You will have to meet her, you know.'

Somerset felt an indescribable backwardness. 'I will go on with my sketching,' he said. 'Perhaps she will not be——'

'O, but it would be quite natural, would it not? Our manners are easier here, you know, than they are in town, and Miss Power has adapted herself to them.'

A compromise was effected by Somerset declaring that he would hold himself in readiness to be discovered on the landing at any convenient time.

A servant entered. 'Miss Power?' said Miss De Stancy, before he could speak.

The man advanced with a card: Miss De Stancy took it up, and read thereon: 'Mr. William Dare.'

'It is not Miss Power who has come, then?' she asked, with a disappointed face.

'No, ma'am.'

She looked again at the card. 'This is some man of business, I suppose—does he want to see me?'

'Yes, miss. Leastwise, he would be glad to see you if Miss Power is not at home.'

Miss De Stancy left the room, and soon returned, saying, 'Mr. Somerset, can you give me your counsel in this matter? This Mr. Dare says he is a photographic amateur, and it seems that he wrote some time ago to Miss Power, who gave him permission to take views of the castle, and promised to show him the best points. But I have heard nothing of it, and scarcely know whether I ought to take his word in her absence. Mrs. Goodman, Miss Power's relative, who usually attends to these things, is away.'

'I dare say it is all right,' said Somerset.

'Would you mind seeing him? If you think it quite in order, perhaps you will instruct him where the best views are to be obtained?'

Thereupon Somerset at once went down to Mr. Dare. His coming as a sort of counterfeit of Miss Power disposed Somerset to judge him with as much severity as justice would allow, and his manner for the moment was not of a kind calculated to dissipate antagonistic instincts. Mr. Dare was standing before the fireplace with his feet wide apart, and his hands in the pockets of his coat-tails, looking at a carving over the mantelpiece. He turned quickly at the sound of Somerset's footsteps, and revealed himself as a person quite out of the common.

His age it was impossible to say. There was not a hair on his face which could serve to hang a guess upon. In repose he appeared a boy; but his actions

were so completely those of a man that the beholder's first estimate of sixteen as his age was hastily corrected to six-and-twenty, and afterwards shifted hither and thither along intervening years as the tenor of his sentences sent him up or down. He had a broad forehead, vertical as the face of a bastion, and his hair, which was parted in the middle, hung as a fringe or valance above, in the fashion sometimes affected by the other sex. He wore a heavy ring, of which the gold seemed fair, the diamond questionable, and the taste indifferent. There were the remains of a swagger in his body and limbs as he came forward, regarding Somerset with a confident smile, as if the wonder were, not why Mr. Dare should be present, but why Somerset should be present likewise; and the first tone that came from Dare's lips wound up his listener's opinion that he did not like him.

A latent power in the man, or boy, was revealed by the circumstance that Somerset did not feel, as he would ordinarily have done, that it was a matter of profound indifference to him whether this gentleman-photographer were a likeable person or no.

'I have called by appointment; or rather, I left a card stating that to-day would suit me, and no objection was made.' Somerset recognized the voice; it was that of the invisible stranger who had talked with the landlord about the De Stancys. Mr. Dare then proceeded to explain his business.

Somerset found from his inquiries that the man had unquestionably been instructed by somebody to take the views he spoke of; and concluded that Dare's curiosity at the inn was, after all, naturally explained by his errand to this place. Blaming himself for a too hasty condemnation of the stranger, who though visually a little too assured was civil enough verbally, Somerset proceeded with the young photographer to sundry corners of the outer ward, and thence across the moat to the field, suggesting advantageous points of view.

The office, being a shadow of his own pursuits, was not uncongenial to Somerset, and he forgot other things in attending to it.

'Now in our country we should stand further back than this, and so get a more comprehensive *coup d'œil*,' said Dare, as Somerset selected a good situation.

'You are not an Englishman, then,' said Somerset.

'I have lived mostly in India, Malta, Gibraltar, the Ionian Islands, and Canada. I there invented a new photographic process, which I am bent upon making famous. Yet I am but a dilettante, and do not follow this art at the base dictation of what men call necessity."

'O indeed,' Somerset replied.

As soon as this business was disposed of, and Mr. Dare had brought up his van and assistant to begin operations, Somerset returned to the castle entrance. While under the archway a man with a professional look drove up in a dog-cart and inquired if Miss Power were at home to-day.

'She has not yet returned, Mr. Havill,' was the reply.

Somerset, who had hoped to hear an affirmative by this time, thought that Miss Power was bent on disappointing him in the flesh, notwithstanding the interest she expressed in him by telegraph; and as it was now drawing towards the end of the afternoon, he walked off in the direction of his inn.

There were two or three ways to that spot, but the pleasantest was by passing through a rambling shrubbery, between whose bushes trickled a broad shallow brook, occasionally intercepted in its course by a transverse chain of old stones, evidently from the castle walls, which formed a miniature waterfall. The walk lay along the river-brink. Soon Somerset saw before him a circular summer-house formed of short sticks nailed to ornamental patterns. Outside the structure, and immediately in the path, stood a man with a book in his hand; and it was presently apparent that this gentle-

man was holding a conversation with some person inside the pavilion, but the back of the building being towards Somerset, the second individual could not be seen

The speaker at one moment glanced into the interior, and at another at the advancing form of the architect, whom, though distinctly enough beheld, the other scarcely appeared to heed in the absorbing interest of his own discourse. Somerset became aware that it was the Baptist minister, whose rhetoric he had heard in the chapel yonder.

'Now,' continued the Baptist minister, 'will you express to me any reason or objection whatever which induces you to withdraw from our communion? It was that of your father, and of his father before him. Any difficulty you may have met with I will honestly try to remove; for I need hardly say that in losing you we lose one of the most valued members of the Baptist church in this district. I speak with all the respect due to your position, when I ask you to realize how irreparable is the injury you inflict upon the cause here by this lukewarm backwardness.'

'I don't withdraw,' said a woman's low voice within.

'What do you do?'

'I decline to attend for the present.'

'And you can give no reason for this?'

There was no reply.

'Or for your refusal to proceed with the baptism?'

'I have been christened.'

'My dear young lady, it is well known that your christening was the work of your aunt, who did it unknown to your parents when she had you in her power, out of pure obstinacy to a church with which she was not in sympathy, taking you surreptitiously, and indefensibly, to the font of the Establishment; so that the rite meant and could mean nothing at all. . . . But I fear that your new position has brought you into con-

tact with the Pædobaptists, that they have disturbed your old principles, and so induced you to believe in the validity of that trumpery ceremony!'

'It seems sufficient.'

'I will demolish the basis of that seeming in three minutes, give me but that time as a listener.'

'I have no objection.'

'Very well. . . . First, then, I will assume that those who have influenced you in the matter have not been able to make any impression upon one so well grounded as yourself in our distinctive doctrine, by the stale old argument drawn from circumcision?'

'You may assume it.'

'Good—that clears the ground. And we now come to the New Testament.'

The minister began to turn over the leaves of his little Bible, which it impressed Somerset to observe was bound with a flap, like a pocket book, the black surface of the leather being worn brown at the corners by long usage. He turned on till he came to the beginning of the New Testament, and then commenced his discourse. After explaining his position, the old man ran very ably through the arguments, citing well-known writers on the point in dispute when he required more finished sentences than his own.

The minister's earnestness and interest in his own case led him unconsciously to include Somerset in his audience as the young man drew nearer; till, instead of fixing his eyes exclusively on the person within the summer-house, the preacher began to direct a good proportion of his discourse upon his new auditor, turning from one listener to the other attentively, without seeming to feel Somerset's presence as superfluous.

'And now,' he said in conclusion, 'I put it to you, sir, as to her: do you find any flaw in my argument? Is there, madam, a single text which, honestly interpreted, affords the least foothold for the Pædobaptists;

in other words, for your opinion on the efficacy of the rite administered to you in your unconscious infancy? I put it to you both as honest and responsible beings.' He turned again to the young man.

It happened that Somerset had been over this ground long ago. Born, so to speak, a High-Church infant, in his youth he had been of a thoughtful turn, till at one time an idea of his entering the Church had been entertained by his parents. He had formed acquaintance with men of almost every variety of doctrinal practice in this country; and, as the pleadings of each assailed him before he had arrived at an age of sufficient mental stability to resist new impressions, however badly substantiated, he inclined to each denomination as it presented itself, was

'Everything by starts, and nothing long,'

till he had travelled through a great many beliefs and doctrines without feeling himself much better than when he set out.

A study of fonts and their origin had qualified him in this particular subject. Fully conscious of the inexpediency of contests on minor ritual differences, he yet felt a sudden impulse towards a mild intellectual tournament with the eager old man—purely as an exercise of his wits in the defence of a fair girl.

'Sir, I accept your challenge to us,' said Somerset, advancing to the minister's side.

VII

AT the sound of a new voice the lady in the bower started, as he could see by her outline through the crevices of the wood-work and creepers. The minister looked surprised.

'You will lend me your Bible, sir, to assist my memory?' he continued.

The minister held out the Bible with some reluctance, but he allowed Somerset to take it from his hand. The latter, stepping upon a large moss-covered stone which stood near, and laying his hat on a flat beech bough that rose and fell behind him, pointed to the minister to seat himself on the grass. The minister looked at the grass, and looked up again at Somerset, but did not move.

Somerset for the moment was not observing him. His new position had turned out to be exactly opposite the open side of the bower, and now for the first time he beheld the interior. On the seat was the woman who had stood beneath his eyes in the chapel, the 'Paula' of Miss De Stancy's enthusiastic eulogies. She wore a summer hat, beneath which her fair curly hair formed a thicket round her forehead. It would be impossible to describe her as she then appeared. Not sensuous enough for an Aphrodite, and too subdued for a Hebe, she would yet, with the adjunct of doves

or nectar, have stood sufficiently well for either of those personages, if presented in a pink morning light, and with mythological scarcity of attire.

Half in surprise she glanced up at him; and lowering her eyes again, as if no surprise were ever let influence her actions for more than a moment, she sat on as before, looking past Somerset's position at the view down the river, visible for a long distance before her till it was lost under the bending trees.

Somerset turned over the leaves of the minister's Bible, and began:—

'In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the seventh chapter and the fourteenth verse——'

Here the young lady raised her eyes in spite of her reserve, but it being, apparently, too much labour to keep them raised, allowed her glance to subside upon her jet necklace, extending it with the thumb of her left hand.

'Sir!' said the Baptist excitedly, 'I know that passage well—it is the last refuge of the Pædobaptists—I foresee your argument. I have met it dozens of times, and it is not worth that snap of the fingers! It is worth no more than the argument from circumcision, or the Suffer-little-children argument.'

'Then turn to the sixteenth chapter of the Acts, and the thirty-third——'

'That, too,' cried the minister, 'is answered by what I said before! I perceive, sir, that you adopt the method of a special pleader, and not that of an honest inquirer. Is it, or is it not, an answer to my proofs from the eighth chapter of the Acts, the thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh verses; the sixteenth of Mark, sixteenth verse; second of Acts, forty-first verse; the tenth and the forty-seventh verse; or the eighteenth and eighth verse?'

'Very well, then. Let me prove the point by other reasoning—by the argument from Apostolic tradition.'

He threw the minister's book upon the grass, and proceeded with his contention, which comprised a fairly good exposition of the earliest practice of the Church, and inferences therefrom. (When he reached this point an interest in his off-hand arguments was revealed by the mobile bosom of Miss Paula Power, though she still occupied herself by drawing out the necklace.) Testimony from Justin Martyr followed; with inferences from Irenæus in the expression, 'Omnes enim venit per semetipsum salvare; omnes inquam, qui per eum renascuntur in Deum, *infantes* et parvulos et pueros et juvenes.' (At the sound of so much seriousness Paula turned her eyes upon the speaker with attention.) He next adduced proof of the signification of 'renascor' in the writings of the Fathers, as reasoned by Wall; arguments from Tertullian's advice to defer the rite; citations from Cyprian, Nazianzen, Chrysostom, and Jerome; and briefly summed up the whole matter.

Somerset looked round for the minister as he concluded. But the old man, after standing face to face with the speaker, had turned his back upon him, and during the latter portions of the attack had moved slowly away. He now looked back; his countenance was full of commiserating reproach as he lifted his hand, twice shook his head, and said, 'In the Epistle to the Philippians, first chapter and sixteenth verse, it is written that there are some who preach in contention, and not sincerely. And in the Second Epistle to Timothy, fourth chapter and fourth verse, attention is drawn to those whose ears refuse the truth, and are turned unto fables. I wish you good afternoon, sir, and that priceless gift, *sincerity*.'

The minister vanished behind the trees; Somerset and Miss Power being left confronting each other alone.

Somerset stepped aside from the stone, hat in hand,

at the same moment in which Miss Power rose from her seat. She hesitated for an instant, and said, with a pretty girlish stiffness, sweeping back the skirt of her dress to free her toes in turning: 'Although you are personally unknown to me, I cannot leave you without expressing my deep sense of your profound scholarship, and my admiration for the thoroughness of your studies in divinity.'

'Your opinion gives me great pleasure,' said Somerset, bowing, and fairly blushing. 'But, believe me, I am no scholar, and no theologian. My knowledge of the subject arises simply from the accident that some few years ago I looked into the question for a special reason. In the study of my profession I was interested in the designing of fonts and baptisteries, and by a natural process I was led to investigate the history of baptism; and some of the arguments I then learnt up still remain with me. That's the simple explanation of my erudition.'

'If your sermons at the church only match your address to-day, I shall not wonder at hearing that the parishioners are at last willing to attend.'

It flashed upon Somerset's mind that she supposed him to be the new curate, of whose arrival he had casually heard, during his sojourn at the inn. Before he could bring himself to correct an error to which, perhaps, more than to anything else, was owing the friendliness of her manner, she went on, as if to escape the embarrassment of silence:—

'I need hardly say that I at least do not doubt the sincerity of your arguments.'

'Nevertheless, I was not altogether sincere,' he answered.

She was silent.

'Then why should you have delivered such a defence of me?' she asked with simple curiosity.

Somerset involuntarily looked in her face for his answer.

Paula again teased the necklace. 'Would you have spoken so eloquently on the other side if I—if occasion had served?' she inquired shyly.

'Perhaps I would.'

Another pause, till she said, 'I, too, was insincere.'

'You?'

'I was.'

'In what way?'

'In letting him, and you, think I had been at all influenced by authority, scriptural or patristic.'

'May I ask, why, then, did you decline the ceremony the other evening?'

'Ah, you, too, have heard of it!' she said quickly.

'No.'

'What then?'

'I saw it.'

She blushed and looked down the river. 'I cannot give my reasons,' she said.

'Of course not,' said Somerset.

'I would give a great deal to possess real logical dogmatism.'

'So would I.'

There was a moment of embarrassment: she wanted to get away, but did not precisely know how. He would have withdrawn had she not said, as if rather oppressed by her conscience, and evidently still thinking him the curate: 'I cannot but feel that Mr. Woodwell's heart has been unnecessarily wounded.'

'The minister's?'

'Yes. He is single-mindedness itself. He gives away nearly all he has to the poor. He works among the sick, carrying them necessaries with his own hands. He teaches the ignorant men and lads of the village when he ought to be resting at home, till he is absolutely prostrate from exhaustion, and then he sits up at night

writing encouraging letters to those poor people who formerly belonged to his congregation in the village, and have now gone away. He always offends ladies, because he can't help speaking the truth as he believes it; but he hasn't offended me!'

Her feelings had risen towards the end, so that she finished quite warmly, and turned aside.

'I was not in the least aware that he was such a man,' murmured Somerset, looking wistfully after the minister. . . . 'Whatever you may have done, I fear that I have grievously wounded a worthy man's heart from an idle wish to engage in a useless, unbecoming, dull, last-century argument.'

'Not dull,' she murmured, 'for it interested me.'

Somerset accepted her correction willingly. 'It was ill-considered of me, however,' he said; 'and in his distress he has forgotten his Bible.' He went and picked up the worn volume from where it lay on the grass.

'You can easily win him to forgive you, by just following, and returning the book to him,' she observed.

'I will,' said the young man impulsively. And, bowing to her, he hastened along the river brink after the minister. He at length saw his friend before him, leaning over the gate which led from the private path into a lane, his cheek resting on the palm of his hand with every outward sign of abstraction. He was not conscious of Somerset's presence till the latter touched him on the shoulder.

Never was a reconciliation effected more readily. When Somerset said that, fearing his motives might be misconstrued, he had followed to assure the minister of his goodwill and esteem, Mr. Woodwell held out his hand, and proved his friendliness in return by preparing to have the controversy on their religious differences over again from the beginning, with exhaustive detail. Somerset evaded this with alacrity, and once having

won his companion to other subjects, he found that the austere man had a smile as pleasant as an infant's on the rare moments when he indulged in it; moreover, that he was warmly attached to Miss Power.

'Though she gives me more trouble than all the rest of the Baptist church in this district,' he said, 'I love her as my own daughter. But I am sadly exercised to know what she is at heart. Heaven supply me with fortitude to contest her wild opinions, and intractability! But she has sweet virtues, and her conduct at times can be most endearing.'

'I believe it!' said Somerset, with more fervour than mere politeness required.

'Sometimes I think those Stancy towers and lands will be a curse to her. The spirit of old papistical times still lingers in the nooks of those silent walls, like a bad odour in a still atmosphere, dulling the iconoclastic emotions of the true Puritan. It would be a pity indeed if she were to be tainted by the very situation that her father's indomitable energy created for her.'

'Do not be concerned about her,' said Somerset gently. 'She's not a Pædobaptist at heart, although she seems so.'

Mr. Woodwell placed his finger on Somerset's arm, saying, 'If she's not a Pædobaptist, or Episcopalian; if she is not vulnerable to the mediæval influences of her mansion, lands, and new acquaintance, it is because she's been vulnerable to what is worse: to doctrines beside which the errors of Pædobaptists, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, are but as air.'

'How? You astonish me.'

'Have you heard in your metropolitan experience of a curious body of New Lights, as they think themselves?' The minister whispered a name to his listener, as if he were fearful of being overheard.

'O no,' said Somerset, shaking his head, and smiling at the minister's horror. 'She's not that; at least, I

think not. . . . She's a woman; nothing more. Don't fear for her; all will be well.'

The poor old man sighed. 'I love her as my own. I will say no more.'

Somerset was now in haste to go back to the lady, to ease her apparent anxiety as to the result of his mission, and also because time seemed heavy in the loss of her discreet voice and soft, buoyant look. Every moment of delay began to be as two. But the minister was too earnest in his converse to see his companion's haste, and it was not till perception was forced upon him by the actual retreat of Somerset that he remembered time to be a limited commodity. He then expressed his wish to see Somerset at his house to tea any afternoon he could spare, and receiving the other's promise to call as soon as he could, allowed the younger man to set out for the summer-house, which he did at a smart pace. When he reached it he looked around, and found she was gone.

Somerset was immediately struck by his own lack of social dexterity. Why did he act so readily on the whimsical suggestion of another person, and follow the minister, when he might have said that he would call on Mr. Woodwell to-morrow, and, making himself known to Miss Power as the visiting architect of whom she had heard from Miss De Stancy, have had the pleasure of attending her to the castle? 'That's what any other man would have had wit enough to do!' he said.

There then arose the question whether her despatching him after the minister was such an admirable act of good-nature to a good man as it had at first seemed to be. Perhaps it was simply a manœuvre for getting rid of himself; and he remembered his doubt whether a certain light in her eyes when she inquired concerning his sincerity were innocent earnestness or the reverse. As the possibility of levity crossed his brain, his face

warmed; it pained him to think that a woman so interesting could condescend to a trick of even so mild a complexion as that. He wanted to think her the soul of all that was tender, and noble, and kind. The pleasure of setting himself to win a minister's goodwill was a little tarnished now.

VIII

THAT evening Somerset was so preoccupied with these things that he left all his sketching implements out-of-doors in the castle grounds. The next morning he hastened thither to secure them from being stolen or spoiled. Meanwhile he was hoping to have an opportunity of rectifying Paula's mistake about his personality, which, having served a very good purpose in introducing them to a mutual conversation, might possibly be made just as agreeable as a thing to be explained away.

He fetched his drawing instruments, rods, sketching-blocks and other articles from the field where they had lain, and was passing under the walls with them in his hands, when there emerged from the outer archway an open landau, drawn by a pair of black horses of fine action and obviously strong pedigree, in which Paula was seated, under the shade of a white parasol with black and white ribbons fluttering on the summit. The morning sun sparkled on the equipage, its newness being made all the more noticeable by the ragged old arch behind.

She bowed to Somerset in a way which might have been meant to express that she had discovered her mistake; but there was no embarrassment in her manner, and the carriage bore her away without her making any

sign for checking it. He had not been walking towards the castle entrance, and she could not be supposed to know that it was his intention to enter that day.

She had looked such a bud of youth and promise that his disappointment at her departure showed itself in his face as he observed her. However, he went on his way, entered a turret, ascended to the leads of the great tower, and stepped out.

From this elevated position he could still see the carriage and the white surface of Paula's parasol in the glowing sun. While he watched the landau stopped, and in a few moments the horses were turned, the wheels and the panels flashed, and the carriage came bowling along towards the castle again.

Somerset descended the stone stairs. Before he had quite got to the bottom he saw Miss De Stancy standing in the outer hall.

'When did you come, Mr. Somerset?' she gaily said, looking up surprised. 'How industrious you are to be at work so regularly every day! We didn't think you would be here to-day: Paula has gone to a vegetable show at Markton, and I am going to join her there soon.'

'O! gone to a vegetable show. But I think she has altered her——'

At this moment the noise of the carriage was heard in the ward, and after a few seconds Miss Power came in—Somerset being invisible from the door where she stood.

'O Paula, what has brought you back?' said Miss De Stancy.

'I have forgotten something.'

'Mr. Somerset is here. Will you not speak to him?'

Somerset came forward, and Miss De Stancy presented him to her friend. Mr. Somerset acknowledged the pleasure by a respectful inclination of his person, and said some words about the meeting yesterday.

'Yes,' said Miss Power, with a serene deliberateness quite noteworthy in a girl of her age; 'I have seen it all since. I was mistaken about you, was I not? Mr. Somerset, I am glad to welcome you here, both as a friend of Miss De Stancy's family, and as the son of your father—which is indeed quite a sufficient introduction anywhere.'

'You have two pictures painted by Mr. Somerset's father, have you not? I have already told him about them,' said Miss De Stancy. 'Perhaps Mr. Somerset would like to see them if they are unpacked?'

As Somerset had from his infancy suffered from a plethora of those productions, excellent as they were, he did not reply quite so eagerly as Miss De Stancy seemed to expect to her kind suggestion, and Paula remarked to him, 'You will stay to lunch? Do order it at your own time, if our hour should not be convenient.'

Her voice was a voice of low note, in quality that of a flute at the grave end of its gamut. If she sang, she was a pure contralto unmistakably.

'I am making use of the permission you have been good enough to grant me—of sketching what is valuable within these walls.'

'Yes, of course, I am willing for anybody to come. People hold these places in trust for the nation, in one sense. You lift your hands, Charlotte; I see I have not convinced you on that point yet.'

Miss De Stancy laughed, and said something to no purpose.

Somehow Miss Power seemed not only more woman than Miss De Stancy, but more woman than Somerset was man; and yet in years she was inferior to both. Though becomingly girlish and modest, she appeared to possess a good deal of composure, which was well expressed by the shaded light of her eyes.

'You have then met Mr. Somerset before?' said Charlotte.

'He was kind enough to deliver an address in my defence yesterday. I suppose I seemed quite unable to defend myself.'

'O no!' said he.

When a few more words had passed she turned to Miss De Stancy and spoke of some domestic matter, upon which Somerset withdrew, Paula accompanying his exit with a remark that she hoped to see him again a little later in the day.

Somerset retired to the chambers of antique lumber, keeping an eye upon the windows to see if she re-entered the carriage and resumed her journey to Markton. But when the horses had been standing a long time the carriage was driven round to the stables. Then she was not going to the vegetable show. That was rather curious, seeing that she had only come back for something forgotten.

These queries and thoughts occupied the mind of Somerset until the bell was rung for luncheon. Owing to the very dusty condition in which he found himself after his morning's labours among the old carvings he was rather late in getting downstairs, and seeing that the rest had gone in he went straight to the dining-hall.

The population of the castle had increased in his absence. There were assembled Paula and her friend Charlotte; a bearded man some years older than himself, with a cold grey eye, who was cursorily introduced to him in sitting down as Mr. Havill, an architect of Markton; also an elderly lady of dignified aspect, in a black satin dress, of which she apparently had a very high opinion. This lady, who seemed to be a mere dummy in the establishment, was, as he now learnt, Mrs. Goodman by name, a widow of a recently deceased gentleman, and aunt to Paula—the identical aunt who had smuggled Paula into a church in her helpless infancy, and had her christened without her parents' knowledge. Having been left in narrow circumstances

by her husband, she was at present living with Miss Power as chaperon and adviser on practical matters—in a word, as ballast to the management. Beyond her Somerset discerned his new acquaintance Mr. Woodwell, who on sight of Somerset was for hastening up to him and performing a laboured shaking of hands in earnest recognition.

Paula had just come in from the garden, and was carelessly laying down her large shady hat as he entered. Her dress, a figured material in black and white, was short, allowing her feet to appear. There was something in her look, and in the style of her corsage, which reminded him of several of the bygone beauties in the gallery. The thought for a moment crossed his mind that she might have been imitating one of them.

'Fine old screen, sir!' said Mr. Havill, in a long-drawn voice across the table when they were seated, pointing in the direction of the traceried oak division between the dining-hall and a vestibule at the end. 'As good a piece of fourteenth-century work as you shall see in this part of the country.'

'You mean fifteenth century, of course?' said Somerset.

Havill was silent. 'You are one of the profession, perhaps?' asked the latter, after a while.

'You mean that I am an architect?' said Somerset. 'Yes.'

'Ah—one of my own honoured vocation.' Havill's face had been not unpleasant until this moment, when he smiled; whereupon there instantly gleamed over him a phase of meanness, remaining until the smile died away.

Havill continued, with slow watchfulness:—

'What enormous sacrileges are committed by the builders every day, I observe! I was driving yesterday to Toneborough where I am erecting a town-hall, and passing through a village on my way I saw the workmen

pulling down a chancel-wall in which they found imbedded a unique specimen of Perpendicular work—a capital from some old arcade—the mouldings wonderfully undercut. They were smashing it up as filling-in for the new wall.'

'It must have been unique,' said Somerset, in the too-readily controversial tone of the educated young man who has yet to learn diplomacy. 'I have never seen much undercutting in Perpendicular stone-work; nor anybody else, I think.'

'O yes—lots of it!' said Mr. Havill, nettled.

Paula looked from one to the other. 'Which am I to take as guide?' she asked. 'Are Perpendicular capitals undercut, as you call it, Mr. Havill, or no?'

'It depends upon circumstances,' said Mr. Havill.

But Somerset had answered at the same time: 'There is seldom or never any marked undercutting in moulded work later than the middle of the fourteenth century.'

Havill looked keenly at Somerset for a time: then he turned to Paula: 'As regards that fine Saxon vaulting you did me the honour to consult me about the other day, I should advise taking out some of the old stones and reinstating new ones exactly like them.'

'But the new ones won't be Saxon,' said Paula. 'And then in time to come, when I have passed away, and those stones have become stained like the rest, people will be deceived. I should prefer an honest patch to any such make-believe of Saxon relics.'

As she concluded she let her eyes rest on Somerset for a moment, as if to ask him to side with her. Much as he liked talking to Paula, he would have preferred not to enter into this discussion with another professional man, even though that man were a spurious article; but he was led on to enthusiasm by a sudden pang of regret at finding that the masterly workmanship in this fine castle was likely to be tinkered and spoilt by such a man as Havill.

'You will deceive nobody into believing that anything is Saxon here,' he said warmly. 'There is not a square inch of Saxon work, as it is called, in the whole castle.'

Paula, in doubt, looked to Mr. Havill.

'O yes, sir; you are quite mistaken,' said that gentleman slowly. 'Every stone of those lower vaults was reared in Saxon times.'

'I can assure you,' said Somerset deferentially, but firmly, 'that there is not an arch or wall in this castle of a date anterior to the year 1100; no one whose attention has ever been given to the study of architectural details of that age can be of a different opinion.'

'I have studied architecture, and I am of a different opinion. I have the best reason in the world for the difference, for I have history herself on my side. What will you say when I tell you that it is a recorded fact that this was used as a castle by the Romans, and that it is mentioned in Domesday as a building of long standing?'

'I shall say that has nothing to do with it,' replied the young man. 'I don't deny that there may have been a castle here in the time of the Romans: what I say is, that none of the architecture we now see was standing at that date.'

There was a silence of a minute, disturbed only by a murmured dialogue between Mrs. Goodman and the minister, during which Paula was looking thoughtfully on the table as if framing a question.

'Can it be,' she said to Somerset, 'that such certainty has been reached in the study of architectural dates? Now, would you really risk anything on your belief? Would you agree to be shut up in the vaults and fed upon bread and water for a week if I could prove you wrong?'

'Willingly,' said Somerset. 'The date of those towers and arches is matter of absolute certainty from the details. That they should have been built before

the Conquest is as unlikely as, say, that the rustiest old gun with a percussion lock should be older than the date of Waterloo.'

'How I wish I knew something precise of an art which makes one so independent of written history!'

Mr. Havill had lapsed into a mannerly silence that was only sullenness disguised. Paula turned her conversation to Miss De Stancy, who had simply looked from one to the other during the discussion, though she might have been supposed to have a prescriptive right to a few remarks on the matter. A commonplace talk ensued, till Havill, who had not joined in it, privately began at Somerset again with a mixed manner of cordiality, contempt, and misgiving.

'You have a practice, I suppose, sir?'

'I am not in practice just yet.'

'Just beginning?'

'I am about to begin.'

'In London, or near here?'

'In London probably.'

'H'm. . . . I am practising in Markton.'

'Indeed. Have you been at it long?'

'Not particularly. I designed the chapel built by this lady's late father; it was my first undertaking—I owe my start, in fact, to Mr. Power. Ever build a chapel?'

'Never. I have sketched a good many churches.'

'Ah—there we differ. I didn't do much sketching in my youth, nor have I time for it now. Sketching and building are two different things, to my mind. I was not brought up to the profession — got into it through sheer love of it. I began as a landscape gardener, then I became a builder, then I was a road contractor. Every architect might do worse than have some such experience. But nowadays 'tis the men who can draw pretty pictures who get recommended, not the practical men. Young prigs win Institute medals for

a pretty design or two which, if anybody tried to build them, would fall down like a house of cards; then they get travelling studentships and what not, and then they start as architects of some new school or other, and think they are the masters of us experienced ones.'

While Somerset was reflecting how far this statement was true, he heard the voice of Paula inquiring, 'Who can he be?'

Her eyes were bent on the window. Looking out, Somerset saw, in the mead beyond the dry ditch, Dare, with his photographic apparatus.

'He is the young gentleman who called about taking views of the castle,' said Charlotte.

'O yes—I remember; it is quite right. He met me in the village and asked me to suggest him some views. I thought him a respectable young fellow.'

'I think he is a Canadian,' said Somerset.

'No,' said Paula, 'he is from the East—at least he implied so to me.'

'There is Italian blood in him,' said Charlotte brightly. 'For he spoke to me with an Italian accent. But I can't think whether he is a boy or a man.'

'It is to be earnestly hoped that the gentleman does not prevaricate,' said the minister, for the first time attracted by the subject. 'I accidentally met him in the lane, and he said something to me about having lived in Malta. I think it was Malta, or Gibraltar—even if he did not say that he was born there.'

'His manners are no credit to his nationality,' observed Mrs. Goodman, also speaking publicly for the first time. 'He asked me this morning to send him out a pail of water for his process, and before I had turned away he began whistling. I don't like whistlers.'

'Then it appears,' said Somerset, 'that he is a being of no age, no nationality, and no behaviour.'

'A complete negative,' added Havill, brightening

into a civil sneer. 'That is, he would be, if he were not a maker of negatives well known in Markton.'

'Not well known, Mr. Havill,' answered Mrs. Goodman firmly. 'For I lived in Markton for thirty years ending three months ago, and he was never heard of in my time.'

'He is something like you, Charlotte,' said Paula, smiling playfully on her companion.

All the men looked at Charlotte, on whose face a delicate nervous blush thereupon made its appearance.

''Pon my word there is a likeness, now I think of it,' said Havill.

Paula bent down to Charlotte and whispered: 'Forgive my rudeness, dear. He is not a nice enough person to be like you. He is really more like one or other of the old pictures about the house. I forget which, and really it does not matter.'

'People's features fall naturally into groups and classes,' remarked Somerset. 'To an observant person they often repeat themselves; though to a careless eye they seem infinite in their differences.'

The conversation flagged, and they idly observed the figure of the cosmopolite Dare as he walked round his instrument in the mead and busied himself with an arrangement of curtains and lenses, occasionally withdrawing a few steps, and looking contemplatively at the towers and walls.

IX

SOMERSET returned to the top of the great tower with a vague consciousness that he was going to do something up there—perhaps sketch a general plan of the structure. But he began to discern that this Stancy-Castle episode in his studies of Gothic architecture might be less useful than ornamental to him as a professional man, though it was too agreeable to be abandoned. Finding after a while that his drawing progressed but slowly, by reason of infinite joyful thoughts more allied to his nature than to his art, he relinquished rule and compass, and entered one of the two turrets opening on the roof. It was not the staircase by which he had ascended, and he proceeded to explore its lower part. Entering from the blaze of light without, and imagining the stairs to descend as usual, he became aware after a few steps that there was suddenly nothing to tread on, and found himself precipitated downwards to a distance of several feet.

Arrived at the bottom, he was conscious of the happy fact that he had not seriously hurt himself, though his leg was twisted awkwardly. Next he perceived that the stone steps had been removed from the turret, so that he had dropped into it as into a dry well; that, owing to its being walled up below, there

was no door of exit on either side of him; that he was, in short, a prisoner.

Placing himself in a more comfortable position he calmly considered the best means of getting out, or of making his condition known. For a moment he tried to drag himself up by his arm, but it was a hopeless attempt, the height to the first step being far too great.

He next looked round at a lower level. Not far from his left elbow, in the concave of the outer wall, was a slit for the admission of light, and he perceived at once that through this slit alone lay his chance of communicating with the outer world. At first it seemed as if it were to be done by shouting, but when he learnt what little effect was produced by his voice in the midst of such a mass of masonry, his heart failed him for a moment. Yet, as either Paula or Miss De Stancy would probably guess his visit to the top of the tower, there was no cause for terror, if some for alarm.

He put his handkerchief through the window-slit, so that it fluttered outside, and, fixing it in its place by a large stone drawn from the loose ones around him, awaited succour as best he could. To begin this course of procedure was easy, but to abide in patience till it should produce fruit was an irksome task. As nearly as he could guess—for his watch had been stopped by the fall—it was now about four o'clock, and it would be scarcely possible for evening to approach without some eye or other noticing the white signal. So Somerset waited, his eyes lingering on the little world of objects around him, till they all became quite familiar. Spiders'-webs in plenty were there, and one in particular just before him was in full use as a snare, stretching across the arch of the window, with radiating threads as its ribs. Somerset had plenty of time, and he counted their number—fifteen. He remained so silent that the owner of this elaborate structure soon forgot the dis-

turbance which had resulted in the breaking of his diagonal ties, and crept out from the corner to mend them. In watching the process, Somerset noticed that on the stonework behind the web sundry names and initials had been cut by explorers in years gone by. Among these antique inscriptions he observed two bright and clean ones, consisting of the words 'De Stancy' and 'W. Dare,' crossing each other at right angles. From the state of the stone they could not have been cut more than a month before this date, and, musing on the circumstance, Somerset passed the time until the sun reached the slit in that side of the tower, where, beginning by throwing in a streak of fire as narrow as a corn-stalk, it enlarged its width till the dusty nook was flooded with cheerful light. It disclosed something lying in the corner, which on examination proved to be a dry bone. Whether it was human, or had come from the castle larder in bygone times, he could not tell. One bone was not a whole skeleton, but it made him think of Ginevra of Modena, the heroine of the Mistletoe Bough, and other cribbed and confined wretches, who had fallen into such traps and been discovered after a cycle of years.

The sun's rays had travelled some way round the interior when Somerset's waiting ears were at last attracted by footsteps above, each tread being brought down by the hollow turret with great fidelity. He hoped that with these sounds would arise that of a soft voice he had begun to like well. Indeed, during the solitary hour or two of his waiting here he had pictured Paula straying alone on the terrace of the castle, looking up, noting his signal, and ascending to deliver him from his painful position by her own exertions. It seemed that at length his dream had been verified. The footsteps approached the opening of the turret; and, attracted by the call which Somerset now raised, began to descend towards him. In a moment, not Paula's

face, but that of a dreary footman of her household, looked into the hole.

Somerset mastered his disappointment, and the man speedily fetched a ladder, by which means the prisoner of two hours ascended to the roof in safety. During the process he ventured to ask for the ladies of the house, and learnt that they had gone out for a drive together.

Before he left the castle, however, they had returned, a circumstance unexpectedly made known to him by his receiving a message from Miss Power, to the effect that she would be glad to see him at his convenience. Wondering what it could possibly mean, he followed the messenger to her room—a small modern library in the Jacobean wing of the house, adjoining that in which the telegraph stood. She was alone, sitting behind a table littered with letters and sketches, and looking fresh from her drive. Perhaps it was because he had been shut up in that dismal dungeon all the afternoon that he felt something in her presence which at the same time charmed and refreshed him.

She signified that he was to sit down; but finding that he was going to place himself on a straight-backed chair some distance off she said, 'Will you sit nearer to me?' and then, as if rather oppressed by her dignity, she left her own chair of business and seated herself at ease on an ottoman which was among the diversified furniture of the apartment.

'I want to consult you professionally,' she went on. 'I have been much impressed by your great knowledge of castellated architecture. Will you sit in that leather chair at the table, as you may have to take notes?'

The young man assented, expressed his gratification, and went to the chair she designated.

'But, Mr. Somerset,' she continued, from the ottoman —the width of the table only dividing them—'I first should just like to know, and I trust you will excuse

my inquiry, if you are an architect in practice, or only as yet studying for the profession?'

'I am just going to practise. I open my office on the first of January next,' he answered.

'You would not mind having me as a client—your first client?' She looked curiously from her sideway face across the table as she said this.

'Can you ask it!' said Somerset warmly. 'What are you going to build?'

'I am going to restore the castle.'

'What, all of it?' said Somerset, astonished at the audacity of such an undertaking.

'Not the parts that are absolutely ruinous: the walls battered by the Parliament artillery had better remain as they are, I suppose. But we have begun wrong; it is I who should ask you, not you me. . . . I fear,' she went on, in that low note which was somewhat difficult to catch at a distance, 'I fear what the antiquarians will say if I am not very careful. They come here a great deal in summer, and if I were to do the work wrong they would put my name in the papers as a dreadful person. But I must live here, as I have no other house, except the one in London, and hence I must make the place habitable. I do hope I can trust to your judgment?'

'I hope so,' he said, with diffidence, for, far from having much professional confidence, he often mistrusted himself. 'I am a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and a Member of the Institute of British Architects—not a Fellow of that body yet, though I soon shall be.'

'Then I am sure you must be trustworthy,' she said, with enthusiasm. 'Well, what am I to do?—How do we begin?'

Somerset began to feel more professional, what with the business chair and the table, and the writing-paper, notwithstanding that these articles, and the room they were in, were hers instead of his; and an evenness of

manner which he had momentarily lost returned to him. 'The very first step,' he said, 'is to decide upon the outlay—what is it to cost?'

He faltered a little, for it seemed to disturb the softness of their relationship to talk thus of hard cash. But her sympathy with his feeling was apparently not great, and she said, 'The expenditure shall be what you advise.'

'What a heavenly client!' he thought. 'But you must just give some idea,' he said gently. 'For the fact is, any sum almost may be spent on such a building: five thousand, ten thousand, twenty thousand, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand.'

'I want it done well; so suppose we say a hundred thousand? My father's solicitor—my solicitor now—says I may go to a hundred thousand without extravagance, if the expenditure is scattered over two or three years.'

Somerset look round for a pen. With quickness of insight she knew what he wanted, and signified where one could be found. He wrote down in large figures—

£100,000.

It was more than he had expected; and, for a young man just beginning practice, the opportunity of playing with another person's money to that extent would afford an exceptionally handsome opening, not so much from the commission it represented, as from the attention that would be bestowed by the art-world on such an undertaking.

Paula had sunk into a reverie. 'I was intending to intrust the work to Mr. Havill, a local architect,' she said. 'But I gathered from his conversation with you to-day that his ignorance of styles might compromise me very seriously. In short, though my father employed him in one or two little matters, it would not be

right—even a morally culpable thing—to place such an historically valuable building in his hands.'

'Has Mr. Havill ever been led to expect the commission?' he asked.

'He may have guessed that he would have it. I have spoken of my intention to him more than once.'

Somerset thought over his conversation with Havill. Well, he did not like Havill personally; and he had strong reasons for suspecting that in the matter of architecture Havill was a quack. But was it quite generous to step in thus, and take away what would be a golden opportunity to such a man of making both ends meet comfortably for some years to come, without giving him at least one chance? He reflected a little longer, and then spoke out his feeling.

'I venture to propose a slightly modified arrangement,' he said. 'Instead of committing the whole undertaking to my hands without better proof of my ability to carry it out than you have at present, let there be a competition between Mr. Havill and myself—let our rival plans for the restoration and enlargement be submitted to a committee of the Royal Institute of British Architects—and let the choice rest with them, subject of course to your approval.'

'It is indeed generous of you to suggest it.' She looked thoughtfully at him; he appeared to strike her in a new light. 'You really recommend it?' The fairness which had prompted his words seemed to incline her still more than before to resign herself entirely to him in the matter.

'I do,' said Somerset deliberately.

'I will think of it, since you wish it. And now, what general idea have you of the plan to adopt? I do not positively agree to your suggestion as yet, so I may perhaps ask the question.'

Somerset, being by this time familiar with the general plan of the castle, took out his pencil and made a rough

sketch. While he was doing it she rose, and coming to the back of his chair, bent over him in silence.

'Ah, I begin to see your conception,' she murmured; and the breath of her words fanned his ear. He finished the sketch, and held it up to her, saying—

'I would suggest that you walk over the building with Mr. Havill and myself, and detail your ideas to us on each portion.'

'Is it necessary?'

'Clients mostly do it.'

'I will, then. But it is too late for me this evening. Please meet me to-morrow at ten.'

X

AT ten o'clock they met in the same room, Paula appearing in a straw hat having a bent-up brim lined with plaited silk, so that it surrounded her forehead like a nimbus; and Somerset armed with sketch-book, measuring-rod, and other apparatus of his craft.

'And Mr. Havill?' said the young man.

'I have not decided to employ him: if I do he shall go round with me independently of you,' she replied rather brusquely.

Somerset was by no means sorry to hear this. His duty to Havill was done.

'And now,' she said, as they walked on together through the passages, 'I must tell you that I am not a mediævalist myself; and perhaps that's a pity.'

'What are you?'

'I am Greek—that's why I don't wish to influence your design.'

Somerset, as they proceeded, pointed out where roofs had been and should be again, where gables had been pulled down, and where floors had vanished, showing her how to reconstruct their details from marks in the walls, much as a comparative anatomist reconstructs an antediluvian from fragmentary bones and teeth. She appeared to be interested, listened attentively, but said little in reply. They were ultimately in a long narrow

passage, indifferently lighted, when Somerset, treading on a loose stone, felt a twinge of weakness in one knee, and knew in a moment that it was the result of the twist given by his yesterday's fall. He paused, leaning against the wall.

'What is it?' said Paula, with a sudden timidity in her voice.

'I slipped down yesterday,' he said. 'It will be right in a moment.'

'I—can I help you?' said Paula. But she did not come near him; indeed, she withdrew a little. She looked up the passage, and down the passage, and became conscious that it was long and gloomy, and that nobody was near. A curious coy uneasiness seemed to take possession of her. Whether she thought, for the first time, that she had made a mistake—that to wander about the castle alone with him was compromising, or whether it was the mere shy instinct of maidenhood, nobody knows; but she said suddenly, 'I will get something for you, and return in a few minutes.'

'Pray don't—it has quite passed!' he said, stepping out again.

But Paula had vanished. When she came back it was in the rear of Charlotte De Stancy. Miss De Stancy had a tumbler in one hand, half full of wine, which she offered him; Paula remaining in the background.

He took the glass, and, to satisfy his companions, drank a mouthful or two, though there was really nothing whatever the matter with him beyond the slight ache above mentioned. Charlotte was going to retire, but Paula said, quite anxiously, 'You will stay with me, Charlotte, won't you? Surely you are interested in what I am doing?'

'What is it?' said Miss De Stancy.

'Planning how to mend and enlarge the castle. Tell Mr. Somerset what I want done in the quadrangle—you know quite well—and I will walk on.'

She walked on; but instead of talking on the subject as directed, Charlotte and Somerset followed chatting on indifferent matters. They came to an inner court and found Paula standing there.

She met Miss De Stancy with a smile. 'Did you explain?' she asked.

'I have not explained yet.' Paula seated herself on a stone bench, and Charlotte went on: 'Miss Power thought of making a Greek court of this. But she will not tell you so herself, because it seems such dreadful anachronism.'

'I said I would not tell any architect myself,' interposed Paula correctingly. 'I did not then know that he would be Mr. Somerset.'

'It is rather startling,' said Somerset.

'A Greek colonnade all round, you said, Paula,' continued her less reticent companion. 'A peristyle you called it—you saw it in a book, don't you remember?—and then you were going to have a fountain in the middle, and statues like those in the British Museum.'

'I did say so,' remarked Paula, pulling the leaves from a young sycamore-tree that had sprung up between the joints of the paving.

From the spot where they sat they could see over the roofs the upper part of the great tower wherein Somerset had met with his misadventure. The tower stood boldly up in the sun, and from one of the slits in the corner something white waved in the breeze.

'What can that be?' said Charlotte. 'Is it the fluff of owls, or a handkerchief?'

'It is my handkerchief,' Somerset answered. 'I fixed it there with a stone to attract attention, and forgot to take it away.'

All three looked up at the handkerchief with interest. 'Why did you want to attract attention?' said Paula.

'O, I fell into the turret; but I got out very easily.'

'O Paula,' said Charlotte, turning to her friend, 'that must be the place where the man fell in, years ago, and was starved to death!'

'Starved to death?' said Paula.

'They say so. O Mr. Somerset, what an escape!' And Charlotte De Stancy walked away to a point from which she could get a better view of the treacherous turret.

'Whom did you think to attract?' asked Paula, after a pause.

'I thought you might see it.'

'Me personally?' And, blushing faintly, her eyes rested upon him.

'I hoped for anybody. I thought of you,' said Somerset.

She did not continue. In a moment she arose and went across to Miss De Stancy. 'Don't *you* go falling down and becoming a skeleton,' she said—Somerset overheard the words, though Paula was unaware of it—after which she clasped her fingers behind Charlotte's neck, and smiled tenderly in her face.

It seemed to be quite unconsciously done, and Somerset thought it a very beautiful action. Presently Paula returned to him and said, 'Mr. Somerset, I think we have had enough architecture for to-day.'

The two women then wished him good-morning and went away. Somerset, feeling that he had now every reason for prowling about the castle, remained near the spot, endeavouring to evolve some plan of procedure for the project entertained by the beautiful owner of those weather-scathed walls. But for a long time the mental perspective of his new position so excited the emotional side of his nature that he could not concentrate it on feet and inches. As Paula's architect (supposing Havill not to be admitted as a competitor), he must of necessity be in constant communication with her for a space of two or three years to come; and

particularly during the next few months. She, doubtless, cherished far too ambitious views of her career to feel any personal interest in this enforced relationship with him; but he would be at liberty to feel what he chose: and to be the victim of an unrequited passion, while afforded such splendid opportunities of communion with the one beloved, deprived that passion of its most deplorable features. Accessibility is a great point in matters of love, and perhaps of the two there is less misery in loving without return a goddess who is to be seen and spoken to every day, than in having an affection tenderly reciprocated by one always hopelessly removed.

With this view of having to spend a considerable time in the neighbourhood Somerset shifted his quarters that afternoon from the little inn at Sleeping-Green to a larger one at Markton. He required more rooms in which to carry out Paula's instructions than the former place afforded, and a more central position. Having reached and dined at Markton he found the evening tedious, and again strolled out in the direction of the castle.

When he reached it the light was declining, and a solemn stillness overspread the pile. The great tower was in full view. That spot of white which looked like a pigeon fluttering from the loophole was his handkerchief, still hanging in the place where he had left it. His eyes yet lingered on the walls when he noticed, with surprise, that the handkerchief suddenly vanished.

Believing that the breezes, though weak below, might have been strong enough at that height to blow it into the turret, and in no hurry to get off the premises, he leisurely climbed up to find it, ascending by the second staircase, crossing the roof, and going to the top of the treacherous turret. The ladder by which he had escaped still stood within it, and beside the ladder he beheld the dim outline of a woman, in a meditative attitude, holding his handkerchief in her hand.

Somerset softly withdrew. When he had reached the ground he looked up. A girlish form was standing at the top of the tower looking over the parapet upon him—possibly not seeing him, for it was dark on the lawn. It was either Miss De Stancy or Paula; one of them had gone there alone for his handkerchief and had remained awhile, pondering on his escape. But which? 'If I were not a faint-heart I should run all risk and wave my hat or kiss my hand to her, whoever she is,' he thought. But he did not do either.

So he lingered about silently in the shades, and then thought of strolling to his rooms at Markton. Just at leaving, as he passed under the inhabited wing, whence one or two lights now blinked, he heard a piano, and a voice singing 'The Mistletoe Bough.' The song had probably been suggested to the romantic fancy of the singer by her visit to the scene of his captivity.

XI

THE identity of the lady whom he had seen on the tower and afterwards heard singing was established the next day.

'I have been thinking,' said Miss Power, on meeting him, 'that you may require a studio on the premises. If so, the room I showed you yesterday is at your service. If I employ Mr. Havill to compete with you I will offer him a similar one.'

Somerset did not decline; and she added, 'In the same room you will find the handkerchief that was left on the tower.'

'Ah, I saw that it was gone. Somebody brought it down?'

'I did,' she shyly remarked, looking up for a second under her shady hat-brim.

'I am much obliged to you.'

'O no. I went up last night to see where the accident happened, and there I found it. When you came up were you in search of it, or did you want me?'

'Then she saw me,' he thought. 'I went for the handkerchief only; I was not aware that you were there,' he answered simply. And he involuntarily sighed.

It was very soft, but she might have heard him, for there was interest in her voice as she continued, 'Did you see me before you went back?'

'I did not know it was you; I saw that some lady was there, and I would not disturb her. I wondered all the evening if it were you.'

Paula hastened to explain: 'We understood that you would stay to dinner, and as you did not come in we wondered where you were. That made me think of your accident, and after dinner I went up to the place where it happened.'

Somerset almost wished she had not explained so lucidly.

And now followed the piquant days to which his position as her architect, or, at worst, as one of her two architects, naturally led. His anticipations were for once surpassed by the reality. Perhaps Somerset's inherent unfitness for a professional life under ordinary circumstances was only proved by his great zest for it now. Had he been in regular practice, with numerous other clients, instead of having merely made a start with this one, he would have totally neglected their business in his exclusive attention to Paula's.

The idea of a competition between Somerset and Havill had been highly approved by Paula's solicitor, but she would not assent to it as yet, seeming quite vexed that Somerset should not have taken the good the gods provided without questioning her justice to Havill. The room she had offered him was prepared as a studio. Drawing-boards and Whatman's paper were sent for, and in a few days Somerset began serious labour. His first requirement was a clerk or two, to do the drudgery of measuring and figuring; but for the present he preferred to sketch alone. Sometimes, in measuring the outworks of the castle, he ran against Havill strolling about with no apparent object, who bestowed on him an envious nod, and passed by.

'I hope you will not make your sketches,' she said, looking in upon him one day, 'and then go away to

your studio in London and think of your other buildings and forget mine. I am in haste to begin, and wish you not to neglect me.'

'I have no other building to think of,' said Somerset, rising and placing a chair for her. 'I had not begun practice, as you may know. I have nothing else in hand but your castle.'

'I suppose I ought not to say I am glad of it; but it is an advantage to have an architect all to one's self. The architect whom I at first thought of told me before I knew you that if I placed the castle in his hands he would undertake no other commission till its completion.'

'I agree to the same,' said Somerset.

'I don't wish to bind you. But I hinder you now —do pray go on without reference to me. When will there be some drawing for me to see?'

'I will take care that it shall be soon.'

He had a metallic tape in his hand, and went out of the room to take some dimension in the corridor. The assistant for whom he had advertised had not arrived, and he attempted to fix the end of the tape by sticking his penknife through the ring into the wall. Paula looked on at a distance.

'I will hold it,' she said.

She went to the required corner and held the end in its place. She had taken it the wrong way, and Somerset went over and placed it properly in her fingers, carefully avoiding to touch them. She obediently raised her hand to the corner again, and stood till he had finished, when she asked, 'Is that all?'

'That is all,' said Somerset. 'Thank you.' Without further speech she looked at his sketch-book, while he marked down the lines just acquired.

'You said the other day,' she observed, 'that early Gothic work might be known by the under-cutting, or something to that effect. I have looked in Rickman

and the Oxford Glossary, but I cannot quite understand what you meant.'

It was only too probable to her lover, from the way in which she turned to him, that she *had* looked in Rickman and the Glossary, and was thinking of nothing in the world but of the subject of her inquiry.

'I can show you, by actual example, if you will come to the chapel?' he returned hesitatingly.

'Don't go on purpose to show me—when you are there on your own account I will come in.'

'I shall be there in half-an-hour.'

'Very well,' said Paula. She looked out of a window, and, seeing Miss De Stancy on the terrace, left him.

Somerset stood thinking of what he had said. He had no occasion whatever to go into the chapel of the castle that day. He had been tempted by her words to say he would be there, and 'half-an-hour' had come to his lips almost without his knowledge. This community of interest—if it were not anything more tender—was growing serious. What had passed between them amounted to an appointment; they were going to meet in the most solitary chamber of the whole solitary pile. Could it be that Paula had well considered this in replying with her friendly 'Very well?' Probably not.

Somerset proceeded to the chapel and waited. With the progress of the seconds towards the half-hour he began to discover that a dangerous admiration for this girl had risen within him. Yet so imaginative was his passion that he hardly knew a single feature of her countenance well enough to remember it in her absence. The meditative judgment of things and men which had been his habit up to the moment of seeing her in the Baptist chapel seemed to have left him—nothing remained but a distracting wish to be always near her, and it was quite with dismay that he recognized what immense importance he was attaching to the

question whether she would keep the trifling engagement or not.

The chapel of Stancy Castle was a silent place, heaped up in corners with a lumber of old panels, framework, and broken coloured glass. Here no clock could be heard beating out the hours of the day—here no voice of priest or deacon had for generations uttered the daily service denoting how the year rolls on. The stagnation of the spot was sufficient to draw Somerset's mind for a moment from the subject which absorbed it, and he thought, 'So, too, will time triumph over all this fervour within me.'

Lifting his eyes from the floor on which his foot had been tapping nervously, he saw Paula standing at the other end. It was not so pleasant when he also saw that Mrs. Goodman accompanied her. The latter lady, however, obligingly remained where she was resting, while Paula came forward, and, as usual, paused without speaking.

'It is in this little arcade that the example occurs,' said Somerset.

'O yes,' she answered, turning to look at it.

'Early piers, capitals, and mouldings, generally alternated with deep hollows, so as to form strong shadows. Now look under the abacus of this capital; you will find the stone hollowed out wonderfully; and also in this arch-mould. It is often difficult to understand how it could be done without cracking off the stone. The difference between this and late work can be felt by the hand even better than it can be seen.' He suited the action to the word and placed his hand in the hollow.

She listened attentively, then stretched up her own hand to test the cutting as he had done; she was not quite tall enough; she would step upon this piece of wood. Having done so she tried again, and succeeded in putting her finger on the spot. No; she could not understand it through her glove even now. She pulled

off her glove, and, her hand resting in the stone channel, her eyes became abstracted in the effort of realization, the ideas derived through her hand passing into her face.

'No, I am not sure now,' she said.

Somerset placed his own hand in the cavity. Now their two hands were close together again. They had been close together half-an-hour earlier, and he had sedulously avoided touching hers. He dared not let such an accident happen now. And yet—surely she saw the situation! Was the inscrutable seriousness with which she applied herself to his lesson a mockery? There was such a bottomless depth in her eyes that it was impossible to guess truly. Let it be that destiny alone had ruled that their hands should be together a second time.

All rumination was cut short by an impulse. He seized her forefinger between his own finger and thumb, and drew it along the hollow, saying, 'That is the curve I mean.'

Somerset's hand was hot and trembling; Paula's, on the contrary, was cool and soft as an infant's.

'Now the arch-mould,' continued he. 'There—the depth of that cavity is tremendous, and it is not geometrical, as in later work.' He drew her unresisting fingers from the capital to the arch, and laid them in the little trench as before.

She allowed them to rest quietly there till he relinquished them. 'Thank you,' she then said, withdrawing her hand, brushing the dust from her finger-tips, and putting on her glove.

Her imperception of his feeling was the very sublimity of maiden innocence if it were real; if not, well, the coquetry was no great sin.

'Mr. Somerset, will you allow me to have the Greek court I mentioned?' she asked tentatively, after a long break in their discourse, as she scanned the green stones

along the base of the arcade, with a conjectural countenance as to his reply.

'Will your own feeling for the genius of the place allow you?'

'I am not a mediævalist: I am an eclectic.'

'You don't dislike your own house on that account.'

'I did at first—I don't so much now. . . . I should love it, and adore every stone, and think feudalism the only true romance of life, if——'

'What?'

'If I were a De Stancy, and the castle the long home of my forefathers.'

Somerset was a little surprised at the avowal: the minister's words on the effects of her new environment recurred to his mind. 'Miss De Stancy doesn't think so,' he said. 'She cares nothing about those things.'

Paula now turned to him: hitherto her remarks had been sparingly spoken, her eyes being directed elsewhere: 'Yes, that is very strange, is it not?' she said. 'But it is owing to the joyous freshness of her nature which precludes her from dwelling on the past—indeed, the past is no more to her than it is to a sparrow or robin. She is scarcely an instance of the wearing out of old families, for a younger mental constitution than hers I never knew."

'Unless that very simplicity represents the second childhood of her line, rather than her own exclusive character.'

Paula shook her head. 'In spite of the Greek court, she is more Greek than I.'

'You represent science rather than art, perhaps.'

'How?' she asked, glancing up under her hat.

'I mean,' replied Somerset, 'that you represent the march of mind—the steamship, and the railway, and the thoughts that shake mankind.'

She weighed his words, and said: 'Ah, yes: you allude to my father. My father was a great man; but

I am more and more forgetting his greatness: that kind of greatness is what a woman can never truly enter into. I am less and less his daughter every day that goes by.'

She walked away a few steps to rejoin the excellent Mrs. Goodman, who, as Somerset still perceived, was waiting for Paula at the discreetest of distances in the shadows at the farther end of the building. Surely Paula's voice had faltered, and she had turned to hide a tear?

She came back again. 'Did you know that my father made half the railways in Europe, including that one over there?' she said, waving her little gloved hand in the direction whence low rumbles were occasionally heard during the day.

'Yes.'

'How did you know?'

'Miss De Stancy told me a little; and I then found his name and doings were quite familiar to me.'

Curiously enough, with his words there came through the broken windows the murmur of a train in the distance, sounding clearer and more clear. It was nothing to listen to, yet they both listened; till the increasing noise suddenly broke off into dead silence.

'It has gone into the tunnel,' said Paula. 'Have you seen the tunnel my father made? the curves are said to be a triumph of science. There is nothing else like it in this part of England.'

'There is not: I have heard so. But I have not seen it.'

'Do you think it a thing more to be proud of that one's father should have made a great tunnel and railway like that, than that one's remote ancestor should have built a great castle like this?'

What could Somerset say? It would have required a casuist to decide whether his answer should depend upon his conviction, or upon the family ties of such a questioner. 'From a modern point of view, railways

are, no doubt, things more to be proud of than castles,' he said; 'though perhaps I myself, from mere association, should decide in favour of the ancestor who built the castle.' The serious anxiety to be truthful that Somerset threw into his observation, was more than the circumstance required. 'To design great engineering works,' he added musingly, and without the least eye to the disparagement of her parent, 'requires no doubt a leading mind. But to execute them, as he did, requires, of course, only a following mind.'

His reply had not altogether pleased her; and there was a distinct reproach conveyed by her slight movement towards Mrs. Goodman. He saw it, and was grieved that he should have spoken so. 'I am going to walk over and inspect that famous tunnel of your father's,' he added gently. 'It will be a pleasant study for this afternoon.'

She went away. 'I am no man of the world,' he thought. 'I ought to have praised that father of hers straight off. I shall not win her respect; much less her love!'

XII

SOMERSET did not forget what he had planned, and when lunch was over he walked away through the trees. The tunnel was more difficult of discovery than he had anticipated, and it was only after considerable winding among green lanes, whose deep ruts were like Cañons of Colorado in miniature, that he reached the slope in the distant upland where the tunnel began. A road stretched over its crest, and thence along one side of the railway-cutting.

He there unexpectedly saw standing Miss Power's carriage; and on drawing nearer he found it to contain Paula herself, Miss De Stancy, and Mrs. Goodman.

'How singular!' exclaimed Miss De Stancy gaily.

'It is most natural,' said Paula instantly. 'In the morning two people discuss a feature in the landscape, and in the afternoon each has a desire to see it from what the other has said of it. Therefore they accidentally meet.'

Now Paula had distinctly heard Somerset declare that he was going to walk there; how then could she say this so coolly? It was with a pang at his heart that he returned to his old thought of her being possibly a finished coquette and dissembler. Whatever she might be, she was not a creature starched very stiffly by Puritanism.

Somerset looked down on the mouth of the tunnel. The popular commonplace that science, steam, and travel must always be unromantic and hideous, was not proven at this spot. On either slope of the deep cutting, green with long grass, grew drooping young trees of ash, beech, and other flexible varieties, their foliage almost concealing the actual railway which ran along the bottom, its thin steel rails gleaming like silver threads in the depths. The vertical front of the tunnel, faced with brick that had once been red, was now weather-stained, lichened, and mossed over in harmonious rusty-browns, pearly greys, and neutral greens, at the very base appearing a little blue-black spot like a mouse-hole—the tunnel's mouth.

The carriage was drawn up quite close to the wood railing, and Paula was looking down at the same time with him; but he made no remark to her.

Mrs. Goodman broke the silence by saying, 'If it were not a railway we should call it a lovely dell.'

Somerset agreed with her, adding that it was so charming that he felt inclined to go down.

'If you do, perhaps Miss Power will order you up again, as a trespasser,' said Charlotte De Stancy. 'You are one of the largest shareholders in the railway, are you not, Paula?'

Miss Power did not reply.

'I suppose as the road is partly yours you might walk all the way to London along the rails, if you wished, might you not, dear?' Charlotte continued.

Paula smiled, and said, 'No, of course not.'

Somerset, feeling himself superfluous, raised his hat to his companions as if he meant not to see them again for a while, and began to descend by some steps cut in the earth; Miss De Stancy asked Mrs. Goodman to accompany her to a barrow over the top of the tunnel; and they left the carriage, Paula remaining alone.

Down Somerset plunged through the long grass,

bushes, late summer flowers, moths, and caterpillars, vexed with himself that he had come there, since Paula was so inscrutable, and humming the notes of some song he did not know. The tunnel that had seemed so small from the surface was a vast archway when he reached its mouth, which emitted, as a contrast to the sultry heat on the slopes of the cutting, a cool breeze, that had travelled a mile underground from the other end. Far away in the darkness of this silent subterranean corridor he could see that other end as a mere speck of light.

When he had conscientiously admired the construction of the massive archivault, and the majesty of its nude ungarnished walls, he looked up the slope at the carriage; it was so small to the eye that it might have been made for a performance by canaries; Paula's face being still smaller, as she leaned back in her seat, idly looking down at him. There seemed something roguish in her attitude of criticism, and to be no longer the subject of her contemplation he entered the tunnel out of her sight.

In the middle of the speck of light before him appeared a speck of black; and then a shrill whistle, dulled by millions of tons of earth, reached his ears from thence. It was what he had been on his guard against all the time,—a passing train; and instead of taking the trouble to come out of the tunnel he stepped into a recess, till the train had rattled past, and vanished onward round a curve.

Somerset still remained where he had placed himself, mentally balancing science against art, the grandeur of this fine piece of construction against that of the castle, and thinking whether Paula's father had not, after all, the best of it, when all at once he saw Paula's form confronting him at the entrance of the tunnel. He instantly went forward into the light; to his surprise she was as pale as a lily.

'O, Mr. Somerset!' she exclaimed. 'You ought not to frighten me so—indeed you ought not! The train came out almost as soon as you had gone in, and as you did not return—an accident was possible!'

Somerset at once perceived that he had been to blame in not thinking of this.

'Please do forgive my thoughtlessness in not reflecting how it would strike you!' he pleaded. 'I—I see I have alarmed you.'

Her alarm was, indeed, much greater than he had at first thought: she trembled so much that she was obliged to sit down, at which he went up to her full of solicitousness.

'You ought not to have done it!' she said. 'I naturally thought—any person would——'

Somerset, perhaps wisely, said nothing at this outburst; the cause of her vexation was, plainly enough, his perception of her discomposure. He stood looking in another direction, till in a few moments she had risen to her feet again, quite calm.

'It would have been dreadful,' she said with faint gaiety, as the colour returned to her face; 'if I had lost my architect, and been obliged to engage Mr. Havill without an alternative.'

'I was really in no danger; but of course I ought to have considered,' he said.

'I forgive you,' she returned good-naturedly. 'I knew there was no *great* danger to a person exercising ordinary discretion; but artists and thinkers like you are indiscreet for a moment sometimes. I am now going up again. What do you think of the tunnel?'

They were crossing the railway to ascend by the opposite path, Somerset keeping his eye on the interior of the tunnel for safety, when suddenly there arose a noise and shriek from the contrary direction behind the trees. Both knew in a moment what it meant, and each seized the other as they rushed off the permanent way.

The ideas of both had been so centred on the tunnel as the source of danger, that the probability of a train from the opposite quarter had been forgotten. It rushed past them, causing Paula's dress, hair, and ribbons to flutter violently, and blowing up the fallen leaves in a shower over their shoulders.

Neither spoke, and they went up several steps, holding each other by the hand, till, becoming conscious of the fact, she withdrew hers; whereupon Somerset stopped and looked earnestly at her; but her eyes were averted towards the tunnel wall.

'What an escape!' he said.

'We were not so very near, I think, were we?' she asked quickly. 'If we were, I think you were—very good to take my hand.'

They reached the top at last, and the new level and open air seemed to give her a new mind. 'I don't see the carriage anywhere,' she said, in the common tones of civilization.

He thought it had gone over the crest of the hill; he would accompany her till they reached it.

'No—please—I would rather not—I can find it very well.' Before he could say more she had inclined her head and smiled and was on her way alone.

The tunnel-cutting appeared a dreary gulf enough now to the young man, as he stood leaning over the rails above it, beating the herbage with his stick. For some minutes he could not criticize or weigh her conduct; the warmth of her presence still encircled him. He recalled her face as it had looked out at him from under the white silk puffing of her black hat, and the speaking power of her eyes at the moment of danger. The breadth of that clear-complexioned forehead—almost concealed by the masses of brown hair bundled up around it—signified that if her disposition were oblique and insincere enough for trifling, coquetting, or in any

way making a fool of him, she had the intellect to do it cruelly well.

But it was ungenerous to ruminate so suspiciously. A girl not an actress by profession could hardly turn pale artificially as she had done, though perhaps mere fright meant nothing, and would have arisen in her just as readily had he been one of the labourers on her estate.

The reflection that such feeling as she had exhibited could have no tender meaning returned upon him with masterful force when he thought of her wealth and the social position into which she had drifted. Somerset, being of a solitary and studious nature, was not quite competent to estimate precisely the disqualifying effect, if any, of her nonconformity, her newness of blood, and other things, among the old county families established round her; but the toughest prejudices, he thought, were not likely to be long invulnerable to such cheerful beauty and brightness of intellect as Paula's. When she emerged, as she was plainly about to do, from the seclusion in which she had been living since her father's death, she would inevitably win her way among her neighbours. She would become the local topic. Fortune-hunters would learn of her existence and draw near in shoals. What chance would there then be for him?

The points in his favour were indeed few, but they were just enough to keep a tantalizing hope alive. Modestly leaving out of count his personal and intellectual qualifications, he thought of his family. It was an old stock enough, though not a rich one. His great-uncle had been the well-known Vice-admiral Sir Armstrong Somerset, who served his country well in the Baltic, the Indies, China, and the Caribbean Sea. His grandfather had been a notable metaphysician. His father, the Royal Academician, was popular. But perhaps this was not the sort of reasoning likely to

occupy the mind of a young woman; the personal aspect of the situation was in such circumstances of far more import. He had come as a wandering stranger—that possibly lent some interest to him in her eyes. He was installed in an office which would necessitate free communion with her for some time to come; that was another advantage, and would be a still greater one if she showed, as Paula seemed disposed to do, such artistic sympathy with his work as to follow up with interest the details of its progress.

The carriage did not reappear, and he went on towards Markton, disinclined to return again that day to the studio which had been prepared for him at the castle. He heard feet brushing the grass behind him, and, looking round, saw the Baptist minister.

'I have just come from the village,' said Mr. Woodwell, who looked worn and weary, his boots being covered with dust; 'and I have learnt that which confirms my fears for her.'

'For Miss Power?'

'Most assuredly.'

'What danger is there?' said Somerset.

'The temptations of her position have become too much for her! She is going out of mourning next week, and will give a large dinner-party on the occasion; for though the invitations are partly in the name of her relative Mrs. Goodman, they must come from her. The guests are to include people of old cavalier families who would have treated her grandfather, sir, and even her father, with scorn for their religion and connections; also the parson and curate—yes, actually people who believe in the Apostolic Succession; and what's more, they're coming. My opinion is, that it has all arisen from her friendship with Miss De Stancy.'

'Well,' cried Somerset warmly, 'this only shows liberality of feeling on both sides! I suppose she has invited you as well?'

'She has not invited me! . . . Mr. Somerset, notwithstanding your erroneous opinions on important matters, I speak to you as a friend, and I tell you that she has never in her secret heart forgiven that sermon of mine, in which I likened her to the church at Laodicea. I admit the words were harsh, but I was doing my duty, and if the case arose to-morrow I would do it again. Her displeasure is a deep grief to me; but I serve One greater than she. . . . You, of course, are invited to this dinner?'

'I have heard nothing of it,' murmured the young man.

Their paths diverged; and when Somerset reached the hotel he was informed that somebody was waiting to see him.

'Man or woman?' he asked.

The landlady, who always liked to reply in person to Somerset's inquiries, apparently thinking him, by virtue of his drawing implements and liberality of payment, a possible lord of Burleigh, came forward and said it was certainly not a woman, but whether man or boy she could not say. 'His name is Mr. Dare,' she added.

'O—that youth,' he said.

Somerset went upstairs, along the passage, down two steps, round the angle, and so on to the rooms reserved for him in this rambling edifice of stage-coach memories, where he found Dare waiting. Dare came forward, pulling out the cutting of an advertisement.

'Mr. Somerset, this is yours, I believe, from the *Architectural World*?'

Somerset said that he had inserted it.

'I think I should suit your purpose as assistant very well.'

'Are you an architect's draughtsman?'

'Not specially. I have some knowledge of the same, and want to increase it.'

'I thought you were a photographer.'

'Also of photography,' said Dare with a bow. 'Though but an amateur in that art I can challenge comparison with Regent Street or Broadway.'

Somerset looked upon his table. Two letters only, addressed in initials, were lying there as answers to his advertisement. He asked Dare to wait, and looked them over. Neither was satisfactory. On this account he overcame his slight feeling against Mr. Dare, and put a question to test that gentleman's capacities. 'How would you measure the front of a building, including windows, doors, mouldings, and every other feature, for a ground plan, so as to combine the greatest accuracy with the greatest despatch?'

'In running dimensions,' said Dare.

As this was the particular kind of work he wanted done, Somerset thought the answer promising. Coming to terms with Dare, he requested the would-be student of architecture to wait at the castle the next day, and dismissed him.

A quarter of an hour later, when Dare was taking a walk in the country, he drew from his pocket eight other letters addressed to Somerset in initials, which, to judge by their style and stationery, were from men far superior to those two whose communications alone Somerset had seen. Dare looked them over for a few seconds as he strolled on, then tore them into minute fragments, and, burying them under the leaves in the ditch, went on his way again.

XIII

THOUGH exhibiting indifference, Somerset had felt a pang of disappointment when he heard the news of Paula's approaching dinner-party. It seemed a little unkind of her to pass him over, seeing how much they were thrown together just now. That dinner meant more than it sounded. Notwithstanding the roominess of her castle, she was at present living somewhat incommodiously, owing partly to the stagnation caused by her recent bereavement, and partly to the necessity for overhauling the De Stancy lumber piled in those vast and gloomy chambers before they could be made tolerable to nineteenth-century fastidiousness.

To give dinners on any large scale before Somerset had at least set a few of these rooms in order for her, showed, to his thinking, an overpowering desire for society.

During the week he saw less of her than usual, her time being to all appearance much taken up with driving out to make calls on her neighbours and receiving return visits. All this he observed from the windows of his studio overlooking the castle ward, in which room he now spent a great deal of his time, bending over drawing-boards and instructing Dare, who worked as well as could be expected of a youth of such varied attainments.

Nearer came the Wednesday of the party, and no

hint of that event reached Somerset, but such as had been communicated by the Baptist minister. At last, on the very afternoon, an invitation was handed into his studio—not a kind note in Paula's handwriting, but a formal printed card in the joint names of Mrs. Goodman and Miss Power. It reached him just four hours before the dinner-time. He was plainly to be used as a stop-gap at the last moment because somebody could not come.

Having previously arranged to pass a quiet evening in his rooms at the Lord Quantock Arms, in reading up chronicles of the castle from the county history, with the view of gathering some ideas as to the distribution of rooms therein before the demolition of a portion of the structure, he decided off-hand that Paula's dinner was not of sufficient importance to him as a professional man and student of art to justify a waste of the evening by going. He accordingly declined Mrs. Goodman's and Miss Power's invitation; and at five o'clock left the castle and walked across the fields to the little town.

He dined early, and, clearing away heaviness with a cup of coffee, applied himself to that volume of the county history which contained the record of Stancy Castle.

Here he read that 'when this picturesque and ancient structure was founded, or by whom, is extremely uncertain. But that a castle stood on the site in very early times appears from many old books of charters. In its prime it was such a masterpiece of fortification as to be the wonder of the world, and it was thought, before the invention of gunpowder, that it never could be taken by any force less than divine.'

He read on to the times when it first passed into the hands of 'De Stancy, Chivaler,' and received the family name, and so on from De Stancy to De Stancy till he was lost in the reflection whether Paula would or would not have thought more highly of him if he had

accepted the invitation to dinner. Applying himself again to the tome, he learned that in the year 1504 Stephen the carpenter was 'paid eleven pence for necessarye repayrs,' and William the mastermason eight shillings 'for whyt lyming of the kitchen, and the lyme to do it with,' including 'a new rope for the fyer bell;' also the sundry charges for 'vij crockes, xiij lytyll pans, a pare of pot hookes, a fyer pane, a lanterne, a chafynge dyshe, and xij candyll stychs.'

Bang went eight strokes of the clock: it was the dinner-hour.

'There, now I can't go, anyhow!' he said bitterly, jumping up, and picturing her receiving her company. How would she look; what would she wear? Profoundly indifferent to the early history of the noble fabric, he felt a violent reaction towards modernism, eclecticism, new aristocracies, everything, in short, that Paula represented. He even gave himself up to consider the Greek court that she had wished for, and passed the remainder of the evening in making a perspective view of the same.

The next morning he awoke early, and, resolving to be at work betimes, started promptly. It was a fine calm hour of day; the grass slopes were silvery with excess of dew, and the blue mists hung in the depths of each tree for want of wind to blow them out. Somerset entered the drive on foot, and when near the castle he observed in the gravel the wheel-marks of the carriages that had conveyed the guests thither the night before. There seemed to have been a large number, for the road where newly repaired was quite cut up. Before going indoors he was tempted to walk round to the wing in which Paula slept.

Rooks were cawing, sparrows were chattering there; but the blind of her window was as closely drawn as if it were midnight. Probably she was sound asleep, dreaming of the compliments which had been paid her

by her guests, and of the future triumphant pleasures that would follow in their train. Reaching the outer stone stairs leading to the great hall he found them shadowed by an awning brilliantly striped with red and blue, within which rows of flowering plants in pots bordered the pathway. She could not have made more preparation had the gathering been a ball. He passed along the gallery in which his studio was situated, entered the room, and seized a drawing-board to put into correct drawing the sketch for the Greek court that he had struck out the night before, thereby abandoning his art principles to please the whim of a girl. Dare had not yet arrived, and after a time Somerset threw down his pencil and leant back.

His eye fell upon something that moved. It was white, and lay in the folding chair on the opposite side of the room. On near approach he found it to be a fragment of swan's-down fanned into motion by his own movements, and partially squeezed into the chink of the chair as though by some person sitting on it.

None but a woman would have worn or brought that swan's-down into his studio, and it made him reflect on the possible one. Nothing interrupted his conjectures till ten o'clock, when Dare came. Then one of the servants tapped at the door to know if Mr. Somerset had arrived. Somerset asked if Miss Power wished to see him, and was informed that she had only wished to know if he had come. Somerset sent a return message that he had a design on the board which he should soon be glad to submit to her, and the messenger departed.

'Fine doings here last night, sir,' said Dare, as he dusted his T-square.

'O indeed!'

'A dinner-party, I hear; eighteen guests.'

'Ah,' said Somerset.

'The young lady was magnificent—sapphires and opals—she carried as much as a thousand pounds upon

her head and shoulders during that three or four hours. Of course they call her charming; *Compuesta no hay muger fea*, as they say at Madrid.'

'I don't doubt it for a moment,' said Somerset, with reserve.

Dare said no more, and presently the door opened, and there stood Paula.

Somerset nodded to Dare to withdraw into an adjoining room, and offered her a chair.

'You wish to show me the design you have prepared?' she asked, without taking the seat.

'Yes; I have come round to your opinion. I have made a plan for the Greek court you were anxious to build.' And he elevated the drawing-board against the wall.

She regarded it attentively for some moments, her finger resting lightly against her chin, and said, 'I have given up the idea of a Greek court.'

He showed his astonishment, and was almost disappointed. He had been grinding up Greek architecture entirely on her account; had wrenched his mind round to this strange arrangement, all for nothing.

'Yes,' she continued; 'on reconsideration I perceive the want of harmony that would result from inserting such a piece of marble-work in a mediæval fortress; so in future we will limit ourselves strictly to synchronism of style—that is to say, make good the Norman work by Norman, the Perpendicular by Perpendicular, and so on. I have informed Mr. Havill of the same thing.'

Somerset pulled the Greek drawing off the board, and tore it in two pieces.

She involuntarily turned to look in his face, but stopped before she had quite lifted her eyes high enough. 'Why did you do that?' she asked with suave curiosity.

'It is of no further use,' said Somerset, tearing the

drawing in the other direction, and throwing the pieces into the fireplace. 'You have been reading up orders and styles to some purpose, I perceive.' He regarded her with a faint smile.

'I have had a few books down from town. It is desirable to know a little about the architecture of one's own house.'

She remained looking at the torn drawing, when Somerset, observing on the table the particle of swan's-down he had found in the chair, gently blew it so that it skimmed across the table under her eyes.

'It looks as if it came off a lady's dress,' he said idly.

'Off a lady's fan,' she replied.

'O, off a fan?'

'Yes; off mine.'

At her reply Somerset stretched out his hand for the swan's-down, and put it carefully in his pocket-book; whereupon Paula, moulding her cherry-red lower lip beneath her upper one in arch self-consciousness at his act, turned away to the window, and after a pause said softly as she looked out, 'Why did you not accept our invitation to dinner?'

It was impossible to explain why. He impulsively drew near and confronted her, and said, 'I hope you pardon me?'

'I don't know that I can quite do that,' answered she, with ever so little reproach. 'I know why you did not come—you were mortified at not being asked sooner! But it was purely by an accident that you received your invitation so late. My aunt sent the others by post, but as yours was to be delivered by hand it was left on her table, and was overlooked.'

Surely he could not doubt her words; those nice friendly accents were the embodiment of truth itself.

'I don't mean to make a serious complaint,' she added, in injured tones, showing that she did. 'Only we had asked nearly all of them to meet you, as the

son of your illustrious father, whom many of my friends know personally; and—they were disappointed.'

It was now time for Somerset to be genuinely grieved at what he had done. Paula seemed so good and honourable at that moment that he could have laid down his life for her.

'When I was dressed, I came in here to ask you to reconsider your decision,' she continued; 'or to meet us in the drawing-room if you could not possibly be ready for dinner. But you were gone.'

'And you sat down in that chair, didn't you, darling, and remained there a long time musing!' he thought. But that he did not say.

'I am very sorry,' he murmured.

'Will you make amends by coming to our garden-party? I ask you the very first.'

'I will,' replied Somerset. To add that it would give him great pleasure, etc., seemed an absurdly weak way of expressing his feelings, and he said no more.

'It is on the nineteenth. Don't forget the day.'

He met her eyes in such a way that, if she were woman, she must have seen it to mean as plainly as words: 'Do I look as if I could forget anything you say?'

She must, indeed, have understood much more by this time—the whole of his open secret. But he did not understand her. History has revealed that a supernumerary lover or two is rarely considered a disadvantage by a woman, from queen to cottage-girl; and the thought made him pause.

XIV

WHEN she was gone he went on with the drawing, not calling in Dare, who remained in the room adjoining. Presently a servant came and laid a paper on his table, which Miss Power had sent. It was one of the morning newspapers, and was folded so that his eye fell immediately on a letter headed 'Restoration or Demolition.'

The letter was professedly written by a dispassionate person solely in the interests of art. It drew attention to the circumstance that the ancient and interesting castle of the De Stancys had unhappily passed into the hands of an iconoclast by blood, who, without respect for the tradition of the county, or any feeling whatever for history in stone, was about to demolish much, if not all, that was interesting in that ancient pile, and insert in its midst a monstrous travesty of some Greek temple. In the name of all lovers of mediæval art, conjured the simple-minded writer, let something be done to save a building which, injured and battered in the Civil Wars, was now to be made a complete ruin by the freaks of an irresponsible owner.

Her sending him the paper seemed to imply that she required his opinion on the case; and in the afternoon, leaving Dare to measure up a wing according to directions, he went out in the hope of meeting her,

having learnt that she had gone to the village. On reaching the church he saw her crossing the churchyard path with her aunt and Miss De Stancy. Somerset entered the enclosure, and as soon as she saw him she came across.

'What is to be done?' she asked.

'You need not be concerned about such a letter as that.'

'I am concerned.'

'I think it dreadful impertinence,' spoke up Charlotte, who had joined them. 'Can you think who wrote it, Mr. Somerset?'

Somerset could not.

'Well, what am I to do?' repeated Paula.

'Just as you would have done before.'

'That's what *I* say,' observed Mrs. Goodman emphatically.

'But I have already altered—I have given up the Greek court.'

'O—you had seen the paper this morning before you looked at my drawing?'

'I had,' she answered.

Somerset thought it a forcible illustration of her natural reticence that she should have abandoned the design without telling him the reason; but he was glad she had not done it from mere caprice.

She turned to him and said quietly, 'I wish *you* would answer that letter.'

'It would be ill-advised,' said Somerset. 'Still, if, after consideration, you wish it much, I will. Meanwhile let me impress upon you again the expediency of calling in Mr. Havill—to whom, as your father's architect, expecting this commission, something perhaps is owed—and getting him to furnish an alternative plan to mine, and submitting the choice of designs to some members of the Royal Institute of British Architects. This letter makes it still more advisable than before.'

'Very well,' said Paula reluctantly.

'Let him have all the particulars you have been good enough to explain to me—so that we start fair in the competition.'

She looked negligently on the grass. 'I will tell the building steward to write them out for him,' she said.

The party separated and entered the church by different doors. Somerset went to a nook of the building that he had often intended to visit. It was called the Stancy aisle; and in it stood the tombs of that family. Somerset examined them: they were unusually rich and numerous, beginning with cross-legged knights in hauberks of chain-mail, their ladies beside them in wimple and cover-chief, all more or less coated with the green mould and dirt of ages: and continuing with others of later date, in fine alabaster, gilded and coloured, some of them wearing round their necks the Yorkist collar of suns and roses, the livery of Edward the Fourth. In scrutinizing the tallest canopy over these he beheld Paula behind it, as if in contemplation of the same objects.

'You came to the church to sketch these monuments, I suppose, Mr. Somerset?' she asked, as soon as she saw him.

'No. I came to speak to you about the letter.'

She sighed. 'Yes: that letter,' she said. 'I am persecuted! If I had been one of these it would never have been written.' She tapped the alabaster effigy of a recumbent lady with her parasol.

'They are interesting, are they not?' he said. 'She is beautifully preserved. The gilding is nearly gone, but beyond that she is perfect.'

'She is like Charlotte,' said Paula. And what was much like another sigh escaped her lips.

Somerset admitted that there was a resemblance, while Paula drew her forefinger across the marble face

of the effigy, and at length took out her handkerchief, and began wiping the dust from the hollows of the features. He looked on, wondering what her sigh had meant, but guessing that it had been somehow caused by the sight of these sculptures in connection with the newspaper writer's denunciation of her as an irresponsible outsider.

The secret was out when in answer to his question, idly put, if she wished she were like one of these, she said, with exceptional vehemence for one of her demeanour—

'I don't wish I was like one of them: I wish I *was* one of them.'

'What—you wish you were a De Stancy?'

'Yes. It is very dreadful to be denounced as a barbarian. I want to be romantic and historical.'

'Miss De Stancy seems not to value the privilege,' he said, looking round at another part of the church where Charlotte was innocently prattling to Mrs. Goodman, quite heedless of the tombs of her forefathers.

'If I were one,' she continued, 'I should come here when I feel alone in the world, as I do to-day; and I would defy people, and say, "You cannot spoil what has been!"'

They walked on till they reached the old black pew attached to the castle—a vast square enclosure of oak panelling occupying half the aisle, and surmounted with a little balustrade above the framework. Within, the baize lining that had once been green, now faded to the colour of a common in August, was torn, kicked and scraped to rags by the feet and hands of the ploughboys who had appropriated the pew as their own special place of worship since it had ceased to be used by any resident at the castle, because its height afforded convenient shelter for playing at marbles and pricking with pins.

Charlotte and Mrs. Goodman had by this time left

the building, and could be seen looking at the head-stones outside.

'If you were a De Stancy,' said Somerset, who had pondered more deeply upon that new wish of hers than he had seemed to do, 'you would be a churchwoman, and sit here.'

'And I should have the pew done up,' she said readily, as she rested her pretty chin on the top rail and looked at the interior, her cheeks pressed into deep dimples. Her quick reply told him that the idea was no new one with her, and he thought of poor Mr. Woodwell's shrewd prophecy as he perceived that her days as a separatist were numbered.

'Well, why can't you have it done up, and sit here?' he said warily.

Paula shook her head.

'You are not at enmity with Anglicanism, I am sure?'

'I want not to be. I want to be—what——'

'What the De Stancys were, and are,' he said insidiously; and her silenced bearing told him that he had hit the nail.

It was a strange idea to get possession of such a nature as hers, and for a minute he felt himself on the side of the minister. So strong was Somerset's feeling of wishing her to show the quality of fidelity to paternal dogma and party, that he could not help adding—

'But have you forgotten that other nobility—the nobility of talent and enterprise?'

'No. But I wish I had a well-known line of ancestors.'

'You have. Archimedes, Newcomen, Watt, Telford, Stephenson, those are your father's direct ancestors. Have you forgotten them? Have you forgotten your father, and the railways he made over half Europe, and his great energy and skill, and all connected with him as if he had never lived?'

She did not answer for some time. 'No, I have not

forgotten it,' she said, still looking into the pew. 'But, I have a *prédilection d'artiste* for ancestors of the other sort, like the De Stancys.'

Her hand was resting on the low pew next the high one of the De Stancys. Somerset looked at the hand, or rather at the glove which covered it, then at her averted cheek, then beyond it into the pew, then at her hand again, until by an indescribable consciousness that he was not going too far he laid his own upon it.

'No, no,' said Paula quickly, withdrawing her hand. But there was nothing resentful or haughty in her tone —nothing, in short, which makes a man in such circumstances feel that he has done a particularly foolish action.

The flower on her bosom rose and fell somewhat more than usual as she added, 'I am going away now —I will leave you here.' Without waiting for a reply she adroitly swept back her skirts to free her feet and went out of the church blushing.

Somerset took her hint and did not follow; and when he knew that she had rejoined her friends, and heard the carriage roll away, he made towards the opposite door. Pausing to glance once more at the alabaster effigies before leaving them to their silence and neglect, he beheld Dare bending over them, to all appearance intently occupied.

He must have been in the church some time— certainly during the tender episode between Somerset and Paula, and could not have failed to perceive it. Somerset blushed: it was unpleasant that Dare should have seen the interior of his heart so plainly. He went across and said, 'I think I left you to finish the drawing of the north wing, Mr. Dare?'

'Three hours ago, sir,' said Dare. 'Having finished that, I came to look at the church—fine building—fine monuments—two interesting people looking at them.'

'What?'

'I stand corrected. *Pensa molto, parla poco*, as the Italians have it.'

'Well, now, Mr. Dare, suppose you get back to the castle?'

'Which history dubs Castle Stancy. . . . Certainly.'

'How do you get on with the measuring?'

Dare sighed whimsically. 'Badly in the morning, when I have been tempted to indulge overnight, and worse in the afternoon, when I have been tempted in the morning!'

Somerset looked at the youth, and said, 'I fear I shall have to dispense with your services, Dare, for I think you have been tempted to-day.'

'On my honour no. My manner is a little against me, Mr. Somerset. But you need not fear for my ability to do your work. I am a young man wasted, and am thought of slight account: it is the true men who get snubbed, while traitors are allowed to thrive!'

'Hang sentiment, Dare, and off with you!' A little ruffled, Somerset had turned his back upon the interesting speaker, so that he did not observe the sly twist Dare threw into his right eye as he spoke. The latter went off in one direction and Somerset in the other, pursuing his pensive way towards Markton with thoughts not difficult to divine.

From one point in her nature he went to another, till he again recurred to her romantic interest in the De Stancy family. To wish she was one of them: how very inconsistent of her. That she really did wish it was unquestionable.

XV

IT was the day of the garden-party. The weather was too cloudy to be called perfect, but it was as sultry as the most thinly-clad young lady could desire. Great trouble had been taken by Paula to bring the lawn to a fit condition after the neglect of recent years, and Somerset had suggested the design for the tents. As he approached the precincts of the castle he discerned a flag of newest fabric floating over the keep, and soon his fly fell in with the stream of carriages that were passing over the bridge into the outer ward.

Mrs. Goodman and Paula were receiving the people in the drawing-room. Somerset came forward in his turn; but as he was immediately followed by others there was not much opportunity, even had she felt the wish, for any special mark of feeling in the younger lady's greeting of him.

He went on through a canvas passage, lined on each side with flowering plants, till he reached the tents; thence, after nodding to one or two guests slightly known to him, he proceeded to the grounds, with a sense of being rather lonely. Few visitors had as yet got so far in, and as he walked up and down a shady alley his mind dwelt upon the new aspect under which Paula had greeted his eyes that afternoon. Her black-and-white costume had finally disappeared, and in its

place she had adopted a picturesque dress of ivory white, with satin enrichments of the same hue; while upon her bosom she wore a blue flower. Her days of infestivity were plainly ended, and her days of gladness were to begin.

His reverie was interrupted by the sound of his name, and looking round he beheld Havill, who appeared to be as much alone as himself.

Somerset already knew that Havill had been appointed to compete with him, according to his recommendation. In measuring a dark corner a day or two before, he had stumbled upon Havill engaged in the same pursuit with a view to the rival design. Afterwards he had seen him receiving Paula's instructions precisely as he had done himself. It was as he had wished, for fairness' sake: and yet he felt a regret, for he was less Paula's own architect now.

'Well, Mr. Somerset,' said Havill, 'since we first met an unexpected rivalry has arisen between us! But I dare say we shall survive the contest, as it is not one arising out of love. Ha-ha-ha!' He spoke in a level voice of fierce pleasantry, and uncovered his regular white teeth.

Somerset supposed him to allude to the castle competition?

'Yes,' said Havill. 'Her proposed undertaking brought out some adverse criticism till it was known that she intended to have more than one architectural opinion. An excellent stroke of hers to disarm criticism. You saw the second letter in the morning papers?'

'No,' said the other.

'The writer states that he has discovered that the competent advice of two architects is to be taken, and withdraws his accusations.'

Somerset said nothing for a minute. 'Have you been supplied with the necessary data for your drawings?' he

asked, showing by the question the track his thoughts had taken.

Havill said that he had. 'But possibly not so completely as you have,' he added, again smiling fiercely. Somerset did not quite like the insinuation, and the two speakers parted, the younger going towards the musicians, who had now begun to fill the air with their strains from the embowered enclosure of a drooping ash. When he got back to the marquees they were quite crowded, and the guests began to pour out upon the grass, the toilets of the ladies presenting a brilliant spectacle—here being coloured dresses with white devices, there white dresses with coloured devices, and yonder transparent dresses with no device at all. A lavender haze hung in the air, the trees were as still as those of a submarine forest; while the sun, in colour like a brass plaque, had a hairy outline in the livid sky.

After watching awhile some young people who were so madly devoted to lawn-tennis that they set about it like day-labourers at the moment of their arrival, he turned and saw approaching a graceful figure in cream-coloured hues, whose gloves lost themselves beneath her lace ruffles, even when she lifted her hand to make firm the blue flower at her breast, and whose hair hung under her hat in great knots so well compacted that the sun gilded the convexity of each knot like a ball.

'You seem to be alone,' said Paula, who had at last escaped from the duty of receiving guests.

'I don't know many people.'

'Yes: I thought of that while I was in the drawing-room. But I could not get out before. I am now no longer a responsible being: Mrs. Goodman is mistress for the remainder of the day. Will you be introduced to anybody? Whom would you like to know?'

'I am not particularly unhappy in my solitude.'

'But you must be made to know a few.'

'Very well—I submit readily.'

She looked away from him, and while he was observing upon her cheek the moving shadow of leaves cast by the declining sun, she said, 'O, there is my aunt,' and beckoned with her parasol to that lady, who approached in the comparatively youthful guise of a grey silk dress that whistled at every touch.

Paula left them together, and Mrs. Goodman then made him acquainted with a few of the best people, describing what they were in a whisper before they came up, among them being the Radical member for Markton, who had succeeded to the seat rendered vacant by the death of Paula's father. While talking to this gentleman on the proposed enlargement of the castle, Somerset raised his eyes and hand towards the walls, the better to point out his meaning; in so doing he saw a face in the square of darkness formed by one of the open windows, the effect being that of a high-light portrait by Vandyck or Rembrandt.

It was his assistant Dare, leaning on the window-sill of the studio, as he smoked his cigarette and surveyed the gay groups promenading beneath.

After holding a chattering conversation with some ladies from a neighbouring country seat who had known his father in bygone years, and handing them ices and strawberries till they were satisfied, he found an opportunity of leaving the grounds, wishing to learn what progress Dare had made in the survey of the castle.

Dare was still in the studio when he entered. Somerset informed the youth that there was no necessity for his working later that day, unless to please himself, and proceeded to inspect Dare's achievements thus far. To his vexation Dare had not plotted three dimensions during the previous two days. This was not the first time that Dare, either from incompetence or indolence, had shown his inutility as a house-surveyor and draughtsman.

'Mr. Dare,' said Somerset, 'I fear you don't suit

me well enough to make it necessary that you should stay after this week.'

Dare removed the cigarette from his lips and bowed. 'If I don't suit, the sooner I go the better; why wait the week?' he said.

'Well, that's as you like.'

Somerset drew the inkstand towards him, wrote out a cheque for Dare's services, and handed it across the table.

'I'll not trouble you to-morrow,' said Dare, seeing that the payment included the week in advance.

'Very well,' replied Somerset. 'Please lock the door when you leave.' Shaking hands with Dare and wishing him well, he left the room and descended to the lawn below.

There he contrived to get near Miss Power again, and inquired of her for Miss De Stancy.

'O! did you not know?' said Paula; 'her father is unwell, and she preferred staying with him this afternoon.'

'I hoped he might have been here.'

'O no; he never comes out of his house to any party of this sort; it excites him, and he must not be excited.'

'Poor Sir William!' muttered Somerset.

'No,' said Paula, 'he is grand and historical.'

'That is hardly an orthodox notion for a Puritan,' said Somerset mischievously.

'I am not a Puritan,' insisted Paula.

The day turned to dusk, and the guests began going in relays to the dining-hall. When Somerset had taken in two or three ladies to whom he had been presented, and attended to their wants, which occupied him three-quarters of an hour, he returned again to the large tent, with a view to finding Paula and taking his leave. It was now brilliantly lighted up, and the musicians, who during daylight had been invisible behind the ash-tree,

were ensconced at one end with their harps and violins. It reminded him that there was to be dancing. The tent had in the meantime half filled with a new set of young people who had come expressly for that pastime. Behind the girls gathered numbers of newly arrived young men with low shoulders and diminutive moustaches, who were evidently prepared for once to sacrifice themselves as partners.

Somerset felt something of a thrill at the sight. He was an infrequent dancer, and particularly unprepared for dancing at present; but to dance once with Paula Power he would give a year of his life. He looked round; but she was nowhere to be seen. The first set began; old and middle-aged people gathered from the different rooms to look on at the gyrations of their children, but Paula did not appear. When another dance or two had progressed, and an increase in the average age of the dancers was making itself perceptible, especially on the masculine side, Somerset was aroused by a whisper at his elbow—

'You dance, I think? Miss Deverell is disengaged. She has not been asked once this evening.' The speaker was Paula.

Somerset looked at Miss Deverell—a sallow lady with black twinkling eyes, yellow costume, and gay laugh, who had been there all the afternoon—and said something about having thought of going home.

'Is that because I asked you to dance?' she murmured. 'There—she is appropriated.' A young gentleman had at that moment approached the uninviting Miss Deverell, claimed her hand and led her off.

'That's right,' said Somerset. 'I ought to leave room for younger men.'

'You need not say so. That bald-headed gentleman is forty-five. He does not think of younger men.'

'Have *you* a dance to spare for me?'

Her face grew stealthily redder in the candle-light.

'O!—I have no engagement at all—I have refused. I hardly feel at liberty to dance; it would be as well to leave that to my visitors.'

'Why?'

'My father, though he allowed me to be taught, never liked the idea of my dancing.'

'Did he make you promise anything on the point?'

'He said he was not in favour of such amusements —no more.'

'I think you are not bound by that, on an informal occasion like the present.'

She was silent.

'You will just once?' said he.

Another silence. 'If you like,' she venturesomely answered at last.

Somerset closed the hand which was hanging by his side, and somehow hers was in it. The dance was nearly formed, and he led her forward. Several persons looked at them significantly, but he did not notice it then, and plunged into the maze.

Never had Mr. Somerset passed through such an experience before. Had he not felt her actual weight and warmth, he might have fancied the whole episode a figment of the imagination. It seemed as if those musicians had thrown a double sweetness into their notes on seeing the mistress of the castle in the dance, that a perfumed southern atmosphere had begun to pervade the marquee, and that human beings were shaking themselves free of all inconvenient gravitation.

Somerset's feelings burst from his lips. 'This is the happiest moment I have ever known,' he said. 'Do you know why?'

'I think I saw a flash of lightning through the opening of the tent,' said Paula, with roguish abruptness.

He did not press for an answer. Within a few minutes a long growl of thunder was heard. It was as if Jove could not refrain from testifying his jealousy

of Somerset for taking this covetable woman so presumptuously in his arms.

The dance was over, and he had retired with Paula to the back of the tent, when another faint flash of lightning was visible through an opening. She lifted the canvas, and looked out, Somerset looking out behind her. Another dance was begun, and being on this account left out of notice, Somerset did not hasten to leave Paula's side.

'I think they begin to feel the heat,' she said.

'A little ventilation would do no harm.' He flung back the tent door where he stood, and the light shone out upon the grass.

'I must go to the drawing-room soon,' she added. 'They will begin to leave shortly.'

'It is not late. The thunder-cloud has made it seem dark—see there; a line of pale yellow stretches along the horizon from west to north. That's evening —not gone yet. Shall we go into the fresh air for a minute?'

She seemed to signify assent, and he stepped off the tent-floor upon the ground. She stepped off also.

The air out-of-doors had not cooled, and without definitely choosing a direction they found themselves approaching a little wooden tea-house that stood on the lawn a few yards off. Arrived here, they turned, and regarded the tent they had just left, and listened to the strains that came from within it.

'I feel more at ease now,' said Paula.

'So do I,' said Somerset.

'I mean,' she added in an undeceiving tone, 'because I saw Mrs. Goodman enter the tent again just as we came out here; so I have no further responsibility.'

'I meant something quite different. Try to guess what.'

She teasingly demurred, finally breaking the silence by saying, 'The rain is come at last,' as great drops

began to fall upon the ground with a smack, like pellets of clay.

In a moment the storm poured down with sudden violence, and they drew further back into the summer-house. The side of the tent from which they had emerged still remained open, the rain streaming down between their eyes and the lighted interior of the marquee like a tissue of glass threads, the brilliant forms of the dancers passing and repassing behind the watery screen, as if they were people in an enchanted submarine palace.

'How happy they are!' said Paula. 'They don't even know that it is raining. I am so glad that my aunt had the tent lined; otherwise such a downpour would have gone clean through it.'

The thunder-storm showed no symptoms of abatement, and the music and dancing went on more merrily than ever.

'We cannot go in,' said Somerset. 'And we cannot shout for umbrellas. We will stay till it is over, will we not?'

'Yes,' she said, 'if you care to. Ah!'

'What is it?'

'Only a big drop came upon my head.'

'Let us stand further in.'

Her hand was hanging by her side, and Somerset's was close by. He took it, and she did not draw it away. Thus they stood a long while, the rain hissing down upon the grass-plot, and not a soul being visible outside the dancing-tent save themselves.

'May I call you Paula?' asked he.

There was no answer.

'May I?' he repeated.

'Yes, occasionally,' she murmured.

'Dear Paula!—may I call you that?'

'O no—not yet.'

'But you know I love you?'

'Yes,' she whispered.

'And shall I love you always?'

'If you wish to.'

'And will you love me?'

Paula did not reply.

'Will you, Paula?' he repeated.

'You may love me.'

'But don't you love me in return?'

'I love you to love me.'

'Won't you say anything more explicit?'

'I would rather not.'

Somerset emitted half a sigh: he wished she had been more demonstrative, yet felt that this passive way of assenting was as much as he could hope for. Had there been anything cold in her passivity he might have felt repressed; but her stillness suggested the stillness of motion imperceptible from its intensity.

'We must go in,' said she. 'The rain is almost over, and there is no longer any excuse for this.'

Somerset bent his lips toward hers.

'No,' said the fair Puritan decisively.

'Why not?' he asked.

'Nobody ever has.'

'But!——' expostulated Somerset.

'To everything there is a season, and the season for this is not just now,' she answered, walking away.

They crossed the wet and glistening lawn, stepped under the tent and parted. She vanished, he did not know whither; and, standing with his gaze fixed on the dancers, the young man waited, till, being in no mood to join them, he went slowly through the artificial passage lined with flowers, and entered the drawing-room. Mrs. Goodman was there, bidding good-night to the early goers, and Paula was just behind her, apparently in her usual mood. His parting with her was quite formal, but that he did not mind, for her

colour rose decidedly higher as he approached, and the light in her eyes was like the ray of a diamond.

When he reached the door he found that his brougham from the Quantock Arms, which had been waiting more than an hour, could not be heard of. That vagrancy of spirit which love induces would not permit him to wait; and, leaving word that the man was to follow him when he returned, he went past the glare of carriage-lamps ranked in the ward, and under the outer arch. The night was now clear and beautiful, and he strolled along his way full of mysterious elation till the vehicle overtook him, and he got in.

Up to this point Somerset's progress in his suit had been, though incomplete, so uninterrupted, that he almost feared the good chance he enjoyed. How should it be in a mortal of his calibre to command success with such a sweet woman for long? He might, indeed, turn out to be one of the singular exceptions which are said to prove rules; but when fortune means to men most good, observes the bard, she looks upon them with a threatening eye. Somerset would even have been content that a little disapproval of his course should have occurred in some quarter, so as to make his wooing more like ordinary life. But Paula was not clearly won, and that was drawback sufficient. In these pleasing agonies and painful delights he passed the journey to Markton.

BOOK THE SECOND

DARE AND HAVILL

BOOK THE SECOND

DARE AND HAVILL

I

YOUNG Dare sat thoughtfully at the window of the studio in which Somerset had left him, till the gay scene beneath became embrowned by the twilight, and the brilliant red stripes of the marquees, the bright sun-shades, the many-tinted costumes of the ladies, were indistinguishable from the blacks and greys of the masculine contingent moving among them. He had occasionally glanced away from the outward prospect to study a small old volume that lay before him on the drawing-board. Near scrutiny revealed the book to bear the title 'Moivre's Doctrine of Chances.'

The evening had been so still that Dare had heard conversations from below with a clearness unsuspected by the speakers themselves; and among the dialogues which thus reached his ears was that between Somerset and Havill on their professional rivalry. When they parted, and Somerset had mingled with the throng, Havill went to a seat at a distance. Afterwards he rose, and walked away; but on the bench he had quitted there remained a small object resembling a book or leather case.

Dare put away the drawing-board and plotting-scales

which he had kept before him during the evening as a reason for his presence at that post of espial, locked up the door, and went downstairs. Notwithstanding his dismissal by Somerset, he was so serene in countenance and easy in gait as to make it a fair conjecture that professional servitude, however profitable, was no necessity with him. The gloom now rendered it practicable for any unbidden guest to join Paula's assemblage without criticism, and Dare walked boldly out upon the lawn. The crowd on the grass was rapidly diminishing; the tennis-players had relinquished sport; many people had gone in to dinner or supper; and many others, attracted by the cheerful radiance of the candles, were gathering in the large tent that had been lighted up for dancing.

Dare went to the garden-chair on which Havill had been seated, and found the article left behind to be a pocket-book. Whether because it was unclasped and fell open in his hand, or otherwise, he did not hesitate to examine the contents. Among a mass of architect's customary memoranda occurred a draft of the letter abusing Paula as an iconoclast or Vandal by blood, which had appeared in the newspaper: the draft was so interlined and altered as to bear evidence of being the original conception of that ungentlemanly attack.

The lad read the letter, smiled, and strolled about the grounds, only met by an occasional pair of individuals of opposite sex in deep conversation, the state of whose emotions led them to prefer the evening shade to the publicity and glare of the tents and rooms. At last he observed the white waistcoat of the man he sought.

'Mr. Havill, the architect, I believe?' said Dare. 'The author of most of the noteworthy buildings in this neighbourhood?'

Havill assented blandly.

'I have long wished for the pleasure of your acquaint-

ance, and now an accident helps me to make it. This pocket-book, I think, is yours?'

Havill clapped his hand to his pocket, examined the book Dare held out to him, and took it with thanks. 'I see I am speaking to the artist, archæologist, Gothic photographer—Mr. Dare.'

'Professor Dare.'

'Professor? Pardon me, I should not have guessed it—so young as you are.'

'Well, it is merely ornamental; and in truth, I drop the title in England, particularly under present circumstances.'

'Ah—they are peculiar, perhaps? Ah, I remember. I have heard that you are assisting a gentleman in preparing a design in opposition to mine—a design——'

'"That he is not competent to prepare himself," you were perhaps going to add?'

'Not precisely that.'

'You could hardly be blamed for such words. However, you are mistaken. I did assist him to gain a little further insight into the working of architectural plans; but our views on art are antagonistic, and I assist him no more. Mr. Havill, it must be very provoking to a well-established professional man to have a rival sprung at him in a grand undertaking which he had a right to expect as his own.'

Professional sympathy is often accepted from those whose condolence on any domestic matter would be considered intrusive. Havill walked up and down beside Dare for a few moments in silence, and at last showed that the words had told, by saying: 'Every one may have his opinion. Had I been a stranger to the Power family, the case would have been different; but having been specially elected by the lady's father as a competent adviser in such matters, and then to be degraded to the position of a mere competitor, it wounds me to the quick——'

'Both in purse and in person, like the ill-used hostess of the Garter.'

'A lady to whom I have been a staunch friend,' continued Havill, not heeding the interruption.

At that moment sounds seemed to come from Dare which bore a remarkable resemblance to the words, 'Ho, ho, Havill!' It was hardly credible, and yet, could he be mistaken? Havill turned. Dare's eye was twisted comically upward.

'What does that mean?' said Havill coldly, and with some amazement.

'Ho, ho, Havill! "Staunch friend" is good—especially after "an iconoclast and Vandal by blood"—"monstrosity in the form of a Greek temple," and so on, eh!'

'Sir, you have the advantage of me. Perhaps you allude to that anonymous letter?'

'O—ho, Havill!' repeated the boy-man, turning his eyes yet further towards the zenith. 'To an outsider such conduct would be natural; but to a friend who finds your pocket-book, and looks into it before returning it, and kindly removes a leaf bearing the draft of a letter which might injure you if discovered there, and carefully conceals it in his own pocket—why, such conduct is unkind!' Dare held up the abstracted leaf.

Havill trembled. 'I can explain,' he began.

'It is not necessary: we are friends,' said Dare assuringly.

Havill looked as if he would like to snatch the leaf away, but altering his mind, he said grimly: 'Well, I take you at your word: we are friends. That letter was concocted before I knew of the competition: it was during my first disgust, when I believed myself entirely supplanted.'

'I am not in the least surprised. But if she knew *you* to be the writer!'

'I should be ruined as far as this competition is

concerned,' said Havill carelessly. 'Had I known I was to be invited to compete, I should not have written it, of course. To be supplanted is hard; and thereby hangs a tale.'

'Another tale? You astonish me.'

'Then you have not heard the scandal, though everybody is talking about it.'

'A scandal implies indecorum.'

'Well, 'tis indecorous. Her infatuated partiality for him is patent to the eyes of a child; a man she has only known a few weeks, and one who obtained admission to her house in the most irregular manner! Had she a watchful friend beside her, instead of that moon-struck Mrs. Goodman, she would be cautioned against bestowing her favours on the first adventurer who appears at her door. It is a pity, a great pity!'

'O, there is love-making in the wind?' said Dare slowly. 'That alters the case for me. But it is not proved?'

'It can easily be proved.'

'I wish it were, or disproved.'

'You have only to come this way to clear up all doubts.'

Havill took the lad towards the tent, from which the strains of a waltz now proceeded, and on whose sides flitting shadows told of the progress of the dance. The companions looked in. The rosy silk lining of the marquee, and the numerous coronas of wax lights, formed a canopy to a radiant scene which, for two at least of those who composed it, was an intoxicating one. Paula and Somerset were dancing together.

'That proves nothing,' said Dare.

'Look at their rapt faces, and say if it does not, sneered Havill.

Dare objected to a judgment based on looks alone.

'Very well—time will show,' said the architect, dropping the tent-curtain. . . . Good God! a girl

worth fifty thousand and more a year to throw herself away upon a fellow like that—she ought to be whipped.'

'Time must *not* show!' said Dare.

'You speak with emphasis.'

'I have reason. I would give something to be sure on this point, one way or the other. Let us wait till the dance is over, and observe them more carefully. *Hörensagen ist halb gelogen!* Hearsay is half lies.'

Sheet-lightnings increased in the northern sky, followed by thunder like the indistinct noise of a battle. Havill and Dare retired to the trees. When the dance ended Somerset and his partner emerged from the tent, and slowly moved towards the tea-house. Divining their goal Dare seized Havill's arm; and the two worthies entered the building unseen, by first passing round behind it. They seated themselves in the back part of the interior, where darkness prevailed.

As before related, Paula and Somerset came and stood within the door. When the rain increased they drew themselves further inward, their forms being distinctly outlined to the gaze of those lurking behind by the light from the tent beyond. But the hiss of the falling rain and the lowness of their tones prevented their words from being heard.

'I wish myself out of this!' breathed Havill to Dare, as he buttoned his coat over his white waistcoat. 'I told you it was true, but you wouldn't believe. I wouldn't she should catch me here eavesdropping for the world!'

'Courage, Man Friday,' said his cooler comrade.

Paula and her lover backed yet further, till the hem of her skirt touched Havill's feet. Their attitudes were sufficient to prove their relations to the most obstinate Didymus who should have witnessed them. Tender emotions seemed to pervade the summer-house like an aroma. The calm ecstasy of the condition of at least one of them was not without a coercive effect upon

the two invidious spectators, so that they must need have remained passive had they come there to disturb or annoy. The serenity of Paula was even more impressive than the hushed ardour of Somerset: she did not satisfy curiosity as Somerset satisfied it; she piqued it. Poor Somerset had reached a perfectly intelligible depth—one which had a single blissful way out of it, and nine calamitous ones; but Paula remained an enigma all through the scene.

The rain ceased, and the pair moved away. The enchantment worked by their presence vanished, the details of the meeting settled down in the watchers' minds, and their tongues were loosened. Dare, turning to Havill, said, 'Thank you; you have done me a timely turn to-day.'

'What! had you hopes that way?' asked Havill satirically.

'I! The woman that interests my heart has yet to be born,' said Dare, with a steely coldness strange in such a juvenile, and yet almost convincing. 'But though I have not personal hopes, I have an objection to this courtship. Now I think we may as well fraternize, the situation being what it is?'

'What is the situation?'

'He is in your way as her architect; he is in my way as her lover: we don't want to hurt him, but we wish him clean out of the neighbourhood.'

'I'll go as far as that,' said Havill.

'I have come here at some trouble to myself, merely to observe: I find I ought to stay to act.'

'If you were myself, a married man with people dependent on him, who has had a professional certainty turned to a miserably remote contingency by these events, you might say you ought to act; but what conceivable difference it can make to you who it is the young lady takes to her heart and home, I fail to understand.'

'Well, I'll tell you—this much at least. I want to keep the place vacant for another man.'

'The place?'

'The place of husband to Miss Power, and proprietor of that castle and domain.'

'That's a scheme with a vengeance. Who is the man?'

'It is my secret at present.'

'Certainly.' Havill drew a deep breath, and dropped into a tone of depression. 'Well, scheme as you will, there will be small advantage to me,' he murmured. 'The castle commission is as good as gone, and a bill for two hundred pounds falls due next week.'

'Cheer up, heart! My position, if you only knew it, has ten times the difficulties of yours, since this disagreeable discovery. Let us consider if we can assist each other. The competition drawings are to be sent in—when?'

'In something over six weeks—a fortnight before she returns from the Scilly Isles, for which place she leaves here in a few days.'

'O, she goes away—that's better. Our lover will be working here at his drawings, and she not present.'

'Exactly. Perhaps she is a little ashamed of the intimacy.'

'And if your design is considered best by the committee, he will have no further reason for staying, assuming that they are not definitely engaged to marry by that time?'

'I suppose so,' murmured Havill discontentedly. 'The conditions, as sent to me, state that the designs are to be adjudicated on by three members of the Institute called in for the purpose; so that she may return, and have seemed to show no favour.'

'Then it amounts to this: your design *must* be best. It must combine the excellences of your invention with the excellences of his. Meanwhile a coolness should be

made to arise between her and him: and as there would be no artistic reason for his presence here after the verdict is pronounced, he would perforce hie back to town. Do you see?'

'I see the ingenuity of the plan, but I also see two insurmountable obstacles to it. The first is, I cannot add the excellences of his design to mine without knowing what those excellences are, which he will of course keep a secret. Second, it will not be easy to promote a coolness between such hot ones as they.'

'You make a mistake. It is only he who is so ardent. She is only lukewarm. If we had any spirit, a bargain would be struck between us: you would appropriate his design; I should cause the coolness.'

'How could I appropriate his design?'

'By copying it, I suppose.'

'Copying it?'

'By going into his studio and looking it over.'

Havill turned to Dare, and stared. 'By George, you don't stick at trifles, young man. You don't suppose I would go into a man's rooms and steal his inventions like that?'

'I scarcely suppose you would,' said Dare indifferently, as he rose.

'And if I were to,' said Havill curiously, 'how is the coolness to be caused?'

'By the second man.'

'Who is to produce him?'

'Her Majesty's Government.'

Havill looked meditatively at his companion, and shook his head. 'In these idle suppositions we have been assuming conduct which would be quite against my principles as an honest man.'

II

A FEW days after the party at Stancy Castle, Dare was walking down the High Street of Markton, a cigarette between his lips and a silver-topped cane in his hand. His eye fell upon a brass plate on an opposite door, bearing the name of Mr. Havill, Architect. He crossed over, and rang the office bell.

The clerk who admitted him stated that Mr. Havill was in his private room, and would be disengaged in a short time. While Dare waited the clerk affixed to the door a piece of paper bearing the words 'Back at 2,' and went away to his dinner, leaving Dare in the room alone.

Dare looked at the different drawings on the boards about the room. They all represented one subject, which, though unfinished as yet, and bearing no inscription, was recognized by the visitor as the design for the enlargement and restoration of Stancy Castle. When he had glanced it over Dare sat down.

The doors between the office and private room were double; but the one towards the office being only ajar Dare could hear a conversation in progress within. It presently rose to an altercation, the tenor of which was obvious. Somebody had come for money.

'Really I can stand it no longer, Mr. Havill—really I will not!' said the creditor excitedly. 'Now this bill

overdue again—what can you expect? Why, I might have negotiated it; and where would you have been then? Instead of that, I have locked it up out of consideration for you; and what do I get for my considerateness? I shall let the law take its course!'

'You'll do me inexpressible harm, and get nothing whatever,' said Havill. 'If you would renew for another three months there would be no difficulty in the matter.'

'You have said so before: I will do no such thing.'

There was a silence; whereupon Dare arose without hesitation, and walked boldly into the private office. Havill was standing at one end, as gloomy as a thunder-cloud, and at the other was the unfortunate creditor with his hat on. Though Dare's entry surprised them, both parties seemed relieved.

'I have called in passing to congratulate you, Mr. Havill,' said Dare gaily. 'Such a commission as has been entrusted to you will make you famous!'

'How do you do?—I wish it would make me rich,' said Havill drily.

'It will be a lift in that direction, from what I know of the profession. What is she going to spend?'

'A hundred thousand.'

'Your commission as architect, five thousand. Not bad, for making a few sketches. Consider what other great commissions such a work will lead to.'

'What great work is this?' asked the creditor.

'Stancy Castle,' said Dare, since Havill seemed too agape to answer. 'You have not heard of it, then? Those are the drawings, I presume, in the next room?'

Havill replied in the affirmative, beginning to perceive the manœuvre. 'Perhaps you would like to see them?' he said to the creditor.

The latter offered no objection, and all three went into the drawing-office.

'It will certainly be a magnificent structure,' said the creditor, after regarding the elevations through his

spectacles. 'Stancy Castle: I had no idea of it! and when do you begin to build, Mr. Havill?' he inquired in mollified tones.

'In three months, I think?' said Dare, looking to Havill.

Havill assented.

'Five thousand pounds commission,' murmured the creditor. 'Paid down, I suppose?'

Havill nodded.

'And the works will not linger for lack of money to carry them out, I imagine,' said Dare. 'Two hundred thousand will probably be spent before the work is finished.'

'There is not much doubt of it,' said Havill.

'You said nothing to me about this?' whispered the creditor to Havill, taking him aside, with a look of regret.

'You would not listen!'

'It alters the case greatly.' The creditor retired with Havill to the door, and after a subdued colloquy in the passage he went away, Havill returning to the office.

'What the devil do you mean by hoaxing him like this, when the job is no more mine than Inigo Jones's?'

'Don't be too curious,' said Dare, laughing. 'Rather thank me for getting rid of him.'

'But it is all a vision!' said Havill, ruefully regarding the pencilled towers of Stancy Castle. 'If the competition were really the commission that you have represented it to be there might be something to laugh at.'

'It must be made a commission, somehow,' returned Dare carelessly. 'I am come to lend you a little assistance. I must stay in the neighbourhood, and I have nothing else to do.'

A carriage slowly passed the window, and Havill recognized the Power liveries. 'Hullo—she's coming

here!' he said under his breath, as the carriage stopped by the kerb. 'What does she want, I wonder? Dare, does she know you?'

'I would just as soon be out of the way.'

'Then go into the garden.'

Dare went out through the back office as Paula was shown in at the front. She wore a grey travelling costume, and seemed to be in some haste.

'I am on my way to the railway-station,' she said to Havill. 'I shall be absent from home for several weeks, and since you requested it, I have called to inquire how you are getting on with the design.'

'Please look it over,' said Havill, placing a seat for her.

'No,' said Paula. 'I think it would be unfair. I have not looked at Mr.——the other architect's plans since he has begun to design seriously, and I will not look at yours. Are you getting on quite well, and do you want to know anything more? If so, go to the castle, and get anybody to assist you. Why would you not make use of the room at your disposal in the castle, as the other architect has done?'

In asking the question her face was towards the window, and suddenly her cheeks became a rosy red. She instantly looked another way.

'Having my own office so near, it was not necessary, thank you,' replied Havill, as, noting her countenance, he allowed his glance to stray into the street. Somerset was walking past on the opposite side.

'The time is—the time fixed for sending in the drawings is the first of November, I believe,' she said confusedly; 'and the decision will be come to by three gentlemen who are prominent members of the Institute of Architects.'

Havill then accompanied her to the carriage, and she drove away.

Havill went to the back window to tell Dare that he

need not stay in the garden; but the garden was empty. The architect remained alone in his office for some time; at the end of a quarter of an hour, when the scream of a railway whistle had echoed down the still street, he beheld Somerset repassing the window in a direction from the railway, with somewhat of a sad gait. In another minute Dare entered, humming the latest air of Offenbach.

'"Tis a mere piece of duplicity!' said Havill.

'What is?'

'Her pretending indifference as to which of us comes out successful in the competition, when she colours carmine the moment Somerset passes by.' He described Paula's visit, and the incident.

'It may not mean Cupid's Entire XXX after all,' said Dare judicially. 'The mere suspicion that a certain man loves her would make a girl blush at his unexpected appearance. Well, she's gone from him for a time; the better for you.'

'He has been privileged to see her off at any rate.'

'Not privileged.'

'How do you know that?'

'I went out of your garden by the back gate, and followed her carriage to the railway. He simply went to the first bridge outside the station, and waited. When she was in the train, it moved forward; he was all expectation, and drew out his handkerchief ready to wave, while she looked out of the window towards the bridge. The train backed before it reached the bridge, to attach the box containing her horses, and the carriage-truck. Then it started for good, and when it reached the bridge she looked out again, he waving his handkerchief to her.'

'And she waving hers back?'

'No, she didn't.'

'Ah!'

'She looked at him—nothing more. I wouldn't give much for his chance.' After a while Dare added

musingly: 'You are a mathematician: did you ever investigate the doctrine of expectations?'

'Never.'

Dare drew from his pocket his 'Book of Chances,' a volume as well thumbed as the minister's Bible. 'This is a treatise on the subject,' he said. 'I will teach it to you some day.'

The same evening Havill asked Dare to dine with him. He was just at this time living *en garçon*, his wife and children being away on a visit. After dinner they sat on till their faces were rather flushed. The talk turned, as before, on the castle-competition.

'To know his design is to win,' said Dare. 'And to win is to send him back to London where he came from.'

Havill inquired if Dare had seen any sketch of the design while with Somerset?

'Not a line. I was concerned only with the old building.'

'Not to know it is to lose, undoubtedly,' murmured Havill.

'Suppose we go for a walk that way, instead of consulting here?'

They went down the town, and along the highway. When they reached the entrance to the park a man driving a basket-carriage came out from the gate and passed them by in the gloom.

'That was he,' said Dare. 'He sometimes drives over from the hotel, and sometimes walks. He has been working late this evening.'

Strolling on under the trees they met three masculine figures, laughing and talking loudly.

'Those are the three first-class London draughtsmen, Bowles, Knowles, and Cockton, whom he has engaged to assist him, regardless of expense,' continued Dare.

'O Lord!' groaned Havill. 'There's no chance for me.'

The castle now arose before them, endowed by the rayless shade with a more massive majesty than either sunlight or moonlight could impart; and Havill sighed again as he thought of what he was losing by Somerset's rivalry. 'Well, what was the use of coming here?' he asked.

'I thought it might suggest something—some way of seeing the design. The servants would let us into his room, I dare say.'

'I don't care to ask. Let us walk through the wards, and then homeward.'

They sauntered on smoking, Dare leading the way through the gate-house into a corridor which was not inclosed, a lamp hanging at the further end.

'We are getting into the inhabited part, I think,' said Havill.

Dare, however, had gone on, and knowing the tortuous passages from his few days' experience in measuring them with Somerset, he came to the butler's pantry. Dare knocked, and nobody answering he entered, took down a key which hung behind the door, and rejoined Havill. 'It is all right,' he said. 'The cat's away; and the mice are at play in consequence.'

Proceeding up a stone staircase he unlocked the door of a room in the dark, struck a light inside, and returning to the door called in a whisper to Havill, who had remained behind. 'This is Mr. Somerset's studio,' he said.

'How did you get permission?' inquired Havill, not knowing that Dare had seen no one.

'Anyhow,' said Dare carelessly. 'We can examine the plans at leisure; for if the placid Mrs. Goodman, who is the only one at home, sees the light, she will only think it is Somerset still at work.'

Dare uncovered the drawings, and young Somerset's brain-work for the last six weeks lay under their eyes.

To Dare, who was too cursory to trouble himself by entering into such details, it had very little meaning; but the design shone into Havill's head like a light into a dark place. It was original; and it was fascinating. Its originality lay partly in the circumstance that Somerset had not attempted to adapt an old building to the wants of the new civilization. He had placed his new erection beside it as a slightly attached structure, harmonizing with the old; heightening and beautifying, rather than subduing it. His work formed a palace, with a ruinous castle annexed as a curiosity. To Havill the conception had more charm than it could have to the most appreciative outsider; for when a mediocre and jealous mind that has been cudgelling itself over a problem capable of many solutions, lights on the solution of a rival, all possibilities in that kind seem to merge in the one beheld.

Dare was struck by the arrested expression of the architect's face. 'Is it rather good?' he asked.

'Yes, rather,' said Havill, subduing himself.

'More than rather?'

'Yes, the clever devil!' exclaimed Havill, unable to depreciate longer.

'How?'

'The riddle that has worried me three weeks he has solved in a way which is simplicity itself. He has got it, and I am undone!'

'Nonsense, don't give way. Let's make a tracing.'

'The ground-plan will be sufficient,' said Havill, his courage reviving. 'The idea is so simple, that if once seen it is not easily forgotten.'

A rough tracing of Somerset's design was quickly made, and blowing out the candle with a wave of his hand, the younger gentleman locked the door, and they went downstairs again.

'I should never have thought of it,' said Havill, as they walked homeward.

'One man has need of another every ten years: *Ogni dieci anni un uomo ha bisogno dell' altro*, as they say in Italy. You'll help me for this turn if I have need of you?'

'I shall never have the power.'

'O yes, you will. A man who can contrive to get admitted to a competition by writing a letter abusing another man, has any amount of power. The stroke was a good one.'

Havill was silent till he said, 'I think these gusts mean that we are to have a storm of rain.'

Dare looked up. The sky was overcast, the trees shivered, and a drop or two began to strike into the walkers' coats from the east. They were not far from the inn at Sleeping-Green, where Dare had lodgings, occupying the rooms which had been used by Somerset till he gave them up for more commodious chambers at Markton; and they decided to turn in there till the rain should be over.

Having possessed himself of Somerset's brains Havill was inclined to be jovial, and ordered the best in wines that the house afforded. Before starting from home they had drunk as much as was good for them; so that their potations here soon began to have a marked effect upon their tongues. The rain beat upon the windows with a dull dogged pertinacity which seemed to signify boundless reserves of the same and long continuance. The wind rose, the sign creaked, and the candles waved. The weather had, in truth, broken up for the season, and this was the first night of the change.

'Well, here we are,' said Havill, as he poured out another glass of the brandied liquor called old port at Sleeping-Green; 'and it seems that here we are to remain for the present.'

'I am at home anywhere!' cried the lad, whose brow was hot and eye wild.

Havill, who had not drunk enough to affect his

reasoning, held up his glass to the light and said, 'I never can quite make out what you are, or what your age is. Are you sixteen, one-and-twenty, or twenty-seven? And are you an Englishman, Frenchman, Indian, American, or what? You seem not to have taken your degrees in these parts.'

'That's a secret, my friend,' said Dare. 'I am a citizen of the world. I owe no country patriotism, and no king or queen obedience. A man whose country has no boundary is your only true gentleman.'

'Well, where were you born—somewhere, I suppose?'

'It would be a fact worth the telling. The secret of my birth lies here.' And Dare slapped his breast with his right hand.

'Literally, just under your shirt-front; or figuratively, in your heart?' asked Havill.

'Literally there. It is necessary that it should be recorded, for one's own memory is a treacherous book of reference, should verification be required at a time of delirium, disease, or death.'

Havill asked no further what he meant, and went to the door. Finding that the rain still continued he returned to Dare, who was by this time sinking down in a one-sided attitude, as if hung up by the shoulder. Informing his companion that he was but little inclined to move far in such a tempestuous night, he decided to remain in the inn till next morning.

On calling in the landlord, however, they learnt that the house was full of farmers on their way home from a large sheep-fair in the neighbourhood, and that several of these, having decided to stay on account of the same tempestuous weather, had already engaged the spare beds. If Mr. Dare would give up his room, and share a double-bedded room with Mr. Havill, the thing could be done, but not otherwise.

To this the two companions agreed. and pre-

sently went upstairs with as gentlemanly a walk and vertical a candle as they could exhibit under the circumstances.

The other inmates of the inn soon retired to rest, and the storm raged on unheeded by all local humanity.

III

AT two o'clock the rain lessened its fury. At half-past two the obscured moon shone forth; and at three Havill awoke. The blind had not been pulled down overnight, and the moonlight streamed into the room, across the bed whereon Dare was sleeping. He lay on his back, his arms thrown out; and his well-curved youthful form looked like an unpedestaled Dionysus in the colourless lunar rays.

Sleep had cleared Havill's mind from the drowsing effects of the last night's sitting, and he thought of Dare's mysterious manner in speaking of himself. This lad resembled the Etruscan youth Tages, in one respect, that of being a boy with, seemingly, the wisdom of a sage; and the effect of his presence was now heightened by all those sinister and mystic attributes which are lent by nocturnal environment. He who in broad daylight might be but a young *chevalier d'industrie* was now an unlimited possibility in social phenomena. Havill remembered how the lad had pointed to his breast, and said that his secret was literally kept there. The architect was too much of a provincial to have quenched the common curiosity that was part of his nature by the acquired metropolitan indifference to other people's lives which, in essence more unworthy even than the former, causes less practical inconvenience in its exercise.

Dare was breathing profoundly. Instigated as above mentioned, Havill got out of bed and stood beside the sleeper. After a moment's pause he gently pulled back the unfastened collar of Dare's nightshirt and saw a word tattooed in distinct characters on his breast. Before there was time for Havill to decipher it Dare moved slightly, as if conscious of disturbance, and Havill hastened back to bed. Dare bestirred himself yet more, whereupon Havill breathed heavily, though keeping an intent glance on the lad through his half-closed eyes to learn if he had been aware of the investigation.

Dare was certainly conscious of something, for he sat up, rubbed his eyes, and gazed around the room; then after a few moments of reflection he drew some article from beneath his pillow. A blue gleam shone from the object as Dare held it in the moonlight, and Havill perceived that it was a small revolver.

A clammy dew broke out upon the face and body of the architect when, stepping out of bed with the weapon in his hand, Dare looked under the bed, behind the curtains, out of the window, and into a closet, as if convinced that something had occurred, but in doubt as to what it was. He then came across to where Havill was lying and still keeping up the appearance of sleep. Watching him awhile and mistrusting the reality of this semblance, Dare brought it to the test by holding the revolver within a few inches of Havill's forehead.

Havill could stand no more. Crystallized with terror, he said, without however moving more than his lips, in dread of hasty action on the part of Dare: 'O, good Lord, Dare, Dare, I have done nothing!'

The youth smiled and lowered the pistol. 'I was only finding out whether it was you or some burglar who had been playing tricks upon me. I find it was you.'

'Do put away that thing! It is too ghastly to

produce in a respectable bedroom. Why do you carry it?'

'Cosmopolites always do. Now answer my questions. What were you up to?' and Dare as he spoke played with the pistol again.

Havill had recovered some coolness. 'You could not use it upon me,' he said sardonically, watching Dare. 'It would be risking your neck for too little an object.'

'I did not think you were shrewd enough to see that,' replied Dare carelessly, as he returned the revolver to its place. 'Well, whether you have outwitted me or no, you will keep the secret as long as I choose.'

'Why?' said Havill.

'Because I keep your secret of the letter abusing Miss P., and of the pilfered tracing you carry in your pocket.'

'It is quite true,' said Havill.

They went to bed again. Dare was soon asleep; but Havill did not attempt to disturb him again. The elder man slept but fitfully. He was aroused in the morning by a heavy rumbling and jingling along the highway overlooked by the window, the front wall of the house being shaken by the reverberation.

'There is no rest for me here,' he said, rising and going to the window, carefully avoiding the neighbourhood of Mr. Dare. When Havill had glanced out he returned to dress himself.

'What's that noise?' said Dare, awakened by the same rumble.

'It is the Artillery going away.'

'From where?'

'Markton barracks.'

'Hurrah!' said Dare, jumping up in bed. 'I have been waiting for that these six weeks.'

Havill did not ask questions as to the meaning of this unexpected remark.

When they were downstairs Dare's first act was to ring the bell and ask if his *Army and Navy Gazette* had arrived.

While the servant was gone Havill cleared his throat and said, 'I am an architect, and I take in the *Architect*; you are an architect, and you take in the *Army and Navy Gazette*.'

'I am not an architect any more than I am a soldier; but I have taken in the *Army and Navy Gazette* these many weeks.'

When they were at breakfast the paper came in. Dare hastily tore it open and glanced at the pages.

'I am going to Markton after breakfast!' he said suddenly, before looking up; 'we will walk together if you like?'

They walked together as planned, and entered Markton about ten o'clock.

'I have just to make a call here,' said Dare, when they were opposite the barrack-entrance on the outskirts of the town, where wheel-tracks and a regular chain of hoof-marks left by the departed batteries were imprinted in the gravel between the open gates. 'I shall not be a moment.' Havill stood still while his companion entered and asked the commissary in charge, or somebody representing him, when the new batteries would arrive to take the place of those which had gone away. He was informed that it would be about noon.

'Now I am at your service,' said Dare, 'and will help you to rearrange your design by the new intellectual light we have acquired.'

They entered Havill's office and set to work. When contrasted with the tracing from Somerset's plan, Havill's design, which was not far advanced, revealed all its weaknesses to him. After seeing Somerset's scheme the bands of Havill's imagination were loosened: he laid his own previous efforts aside, got fresh sheets of drawing-paper and drew with vigour.

'I may as well stay and help you,' said Dare. 'I have nothing to do till twelve o'clock; and not much then.'

So there he remained. At a quarter to twelve children and idlers began to gather against the railings of Havill's house. A few minutes past twelve the noise of an arriving host was heard at the entrance to the town. Thereupon Dare and Havill went to the window.

The X and Y Batteries of the Z Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery, were entering Markton, each headed by the major with his bugler behind him. In a moment they came abreast and passed, every man in his place; that is to say:

Six shining horses, in pairs, harnessed by rope-traces white as milk, with a driver on each near horse: two gunners on the lead-coloured stout-wheeled limber, their carcases jolted to a jelly for lack of springs: two gunners on the lead-coloured stout-wheeled gun-carriage, in the same personal condition: the nine-pounder gun, dipping its heavy head to earth, as if ashamed of its office in these enlightened times: the complement of jingling and prancing troopers, riding at the wheels and elsewhere: six shining horses with their drivers, and traces white as milk, as before: two more gallant jolted men, on another jolting limber, and more stout wheels and lead-coloured paint: two more jolted men on another drooping gun: more jingling troopers on horseback: again six shining draught-horses, traces, drivers, gun, gunners, lead paint, stout wheels and troopers as before.

So each detachment lumbered slowly by, all eyes martially forward, except when wandering in quest of female beauty.

'He's a fine fellow, is he not?' said Dare, denoting by a nod a mounted officer, with a sallow, yet handsome face, and black moustache, who came up on a bay gelding with the men of his battery.

'What is he?' said Havill.

'A captain who lacks advancement.'

'Do you know him?'

'I know him?'

'Yes; do you?'

Dare made no reply; and they watched the captain as he rode past with his drawn sword in his hand, the sun making a little sun upon its blade, and upon his brilliantly polished long boots and bright spurs; also warming his gold cross-belt and braidings, white gloves, busby with its red bag, and tall white plume.

Havill seemed to be too indifferent to press his questioning; and when all the soldiers had passed by, Dare observed to his companion that he should leave him for a short time, but would return in the afternoon or next day.

After this he walked up the street in the rear of the artillery, following them to the barracks. On reaching the gates he found a crowd of people gathered outside, looking with admiration at the guns and gunners drawn up within the enclosure. When the soldiers were dismissed to their quarters the sightseers dispersed, and Dare went through the gates to the barrack-yard.

The guns were standing on the green; the soldiers and horses were scattered about, and the handsome captain whom Dare had pointed out to Havill was inspecting the buildings in the company of the quartermaster. Dare made a mental note of these things, and, apparently changing a previous intention, went out from the barracks and returned to the town.

IV

TO return for a while to George Somerset. The sun of his later existence having vanished from that young man's horizon, he confined himself closely to the studio, superintending the exertions of his draughtsmen Bowles, Knowles, and Cockton, who were now in the full swing of working out Somerset's creations from the sketches he had previously prepared.

He had so far got the start of Havill in the competition that, by the help of these three gentlemen, his design was soon finished. But he gained no unfair advantage on this account, an additional month being allowed to Havill to compensate for his later information.

Before sealing up his drawings Somerset wished to spend a short time in London, and dismissing his assistants till further notice, he locked up the rooms which had been appropriated as office and studio and prepared for the journey.

It was afternoon. Somerset walked from the castle in the direction of the wood to reach Markton by a detour. He had not proceeded far when there approached his path a man riding a bay horse with a square-cut tail. The equestrian wore a grizzled beard, and looked at Somerset with a piercing eye as he noiselessly ambled nearer over the soft sod of the park.

He proved to be Mr. Cunningham Haze, chief constable of the district, who had become slightly known to Somerset during his sojourn here.

'One word, Mr. Somerset,' said the Chief, after they had exchanged nods of recognition, reining his horse as he spoke.

Somerset stopped.

'You have a studio at the castle in which you are preparing drawings?'

'I have.'

'Have you a clerk?'

'I had three till yesterday, when I paid them off.'

'Would they have any right to enter the studio late at night?'

'There would have been nothing wrong in their doing so. Either of them might have gone back at any time for something forgotten. They lived quite near the castle.'

'Ah, then all is explained. I was riding past over the grass on the night of last Thursday, and I saw two persons in your studio with a light. It must have been about half-past nine o'clock. One of them came forward and pulled down the blind so that the light fell upon his face. But I only saw it for a short time.'

'If it were Knowles or Cockton he would have had a beard.'

'He had no beard.'

'Then it must have been Bowles. A young man?'

'Quite young. His companion in the background seemed older.'

'They are all about the same age really. By the way—it couldn't have been Dare—and Havill, surely! Would you recognize them again?'

'The young one possibly. The other not at all, for he remained in the shade.'

Somerset endeavoured to discern in a description by the chief constable the features of Mr. Bowles; but

it seemed to approximate more closely to Dare in spite of himself. 'I'll make a sketch of the only one who had no business there, and show it to you,' he presently said. 'I should like this cleared up.'

Mr. Cunningham Haze said he was going to Toneborough that afternoon, but would return in the evening before Somerset's departure. With this they parted. A possible motive for Dare's presence in the rooms had instantly presented itself to Somerset's mind, for he had seen Dare enter Havill's office more than once, as if he were at work there.

He accordingly sat on the next stile, and taking out his pocket-book began a pencil sketch of Dare's head, to show to Mr. Haze in the evening; for if Dare had indeed found admission with Havill, or as his agent, the design was lost.

But he could not make a drawing that was a satisfactory likeness. Then he luckily remembered that Dare, in the intense warmth of admiration he had affected for Somerset on the first day or two of their acquaintance, had begged for his photograph, and in return for it had left one of himself on the mantelpiece, taken as he said by his own process. Somerset resolved to show this production to Mr. Haze, as being more to the purpose than a sketch, and instead of finishing the latter, proceeded on his way.

He entered the old overgrown drive which wound indirectly through the wood to Markton. The road, having been laid out for idling rather than for progress, bent sharply hither and thither among the fissured trunks and layers of horny leaves which lay there all the year round, interspersed with cushions of vivid green moss that formed oases in the rust-red expanse.

Reaching a point where the road made one of its bends between two large beeches, a man and woman revealed themselves at a few yards' distance, walking slowly towards him. In the short and quaint lady he

recognized Charlotte De Stancy, whom he remembered not to have seen for several days.

She slightly blushed and said, 'O, this is pleasant, Mr. Somerset! Let me present my brother to you, Captain De Stancy of the Royal Horse Artillery.'

Her brother came forward and shook hands heartily with Somerset; and they all three rambled on together, talking of the season, the place, the fishing, the shooting, and whatever else came uppermost in their minds.

Captain De Stancy was a personage who would have been called interesting by women well out of their teens. He was ripe, without having declined a digit towards fogeyism. He was sufficiently old and experienced to suggest a goodly accumulation of touching amourettes in the chambers of his memory, and not too old for the possibility of increasing the store. He was apparently about eight-and-thirty, less tall than his father had been, but admirably made; and his every movement exhibited a fine combination of strength and flexibility of limb. His face was somewhat thin and thoughtful, its complexion being naturally pale, though darkened by exposure to a warmer sun than ours. His features were somewhat striking; his moustache and hair raven black; and his eyes, denied the attributes of military keenness by reason of the largeness and darkness of their aspect, acquired thereby a softness of expression that was in part womanly. His mouth as far as it could be seen reproduced this characteristic, which might have been called weakness, or goodness, according to the mental attitude of the observer. It was large but well formed, and showed an unimpaired line of teeth within. His dress at present was a heather-coloured rural suit, cut close to his figure.

'You knew my cousin, Jack Ravensbury?' he said to Somerset, as they went on. 'Poor Jack: he was a good fellow.'

'He was a very good fellow.'

'He would have been made a parson if he had lived —it was his great wish. I, as his senior, and a man of the world as I thought myself, used to chaff him about it when he was a boy, and tell him not to be a milksop, but to enter the army. But I think Jack was right—the parsons have the best of it, I see now.'

'They would hardly admit that,' said Somerset, laughing. 'Nor can I.'

'Nor I,' said the captain's sister. 'See how lovely you all looked with your big guns and uniform when you entered Markton; and then see how stupid the parsons look by comparison, when they flock into Markton at a Visitation.'

'Ah, yes,' said De Stancy,

> "Doubtless it is a brilliant masquerade;
> But when of the first sight you've had your fill,
> It palls—at least it does so upon me,
> This paradise of pleasure and ennui."

When one is getting on for forty;

> "When we have made our love, and gamed our gaming,
> Dressed, voted, shone, and maybe, something more;
> With dandies dined, heard senators declaiming;
> Seen beauties brought to market by the score,"

and so on, there arises a strong desire for a quiet old-fashioned country life, in which incessant movement is not a necessary part of the programme.'

'But you are not forty, Will?' said Charlotte.

'My dear, I was thirty-nine last January.'

'Well, men about here are youths at that age. It was India used you up so, when you served in the line, was it not? I wish you had never gone there!'

'So do I,' said De Stancy drily. 'But I ought to grow a youth again, like the rest, now I am in my native air.'

They came to a narrow brook, not wider than a man's stride, and Miss De Stancy halted on the edge.

'Why, Lottie, you used to jump it easily enough,' said her brother. 'But we won't make her do it now.' He took her in his arms, and lifted her over, giving her a gratuitous ride for some additional yards, and saying, 'You are not a pound heavier, Lott, than you were at ten years old. . . . What do you think of the country here, Mr. Somerset? Are you going to stay long?'

'I think very well of it,' said Somerset. 'But I leave to-morrow morning, which makes it necessary that I turn back in a minute or two from walking with you.'

'That's a disappointment. I had hoped you were going to finish out the autumn with shooting. There's some, very fair, to be got here on reasonable terms, I've just heard.'

'But you need not hire any!' spoke up Charlotte. 'Paula would let you shoot anything, I am sure. She has not been here long enough to preserve much game, and the poachers had it all in Mr. Wilkins' time. But what there is you might kill with pleasure to her.'

'No, thank you,' said De Stancy grimly. 'I prefer to remain a stranger to Miss Power—Miss Steam-Power, she ought to be called—and to all her possessions.'

Charlotte was subdued, and did not insist further; while Somerset, before he could feel himself able to decide on the mood in which the gallant captain's joke at Paula's expense should be taken, wondered whether it were a married man or a bachelor who uttered it.

He had not been able to keep the question of De Stancy's domestic state out of his head from the first moment of seeing him. Assuming De Stancy to be a husband, he felt there might be some excuse for his remark; if unmarried, Somerset liked the satire still better; in such circumstances there was a relief in the thought that Captain De Stancy's prejudices might be infinitely stronger than those of his sister or father.

'Going to-morrow, did you say, Mr. Somerset?' asked Miss De Stancy. 'Then will you dine with us to-day? My father is anxious that you should do so before you go. I am sorry there will be only our own family present to meet you; but you can leave as early as you wish.'

Her brother seconded the invitation, and Somerset promised, though his leisure for that evening was short. He was in truth somewhat inclined to like De Stancy; for though the captain had said nothing of any value either on war, commerce, science, or art, he had seemed attractive to the younger man. Beyond the natural interest a soldier has for imaginative minds in the civil walks of life, De Stancy's occasional manifestations of *tædium vitæ* were too poetically shaped to be repellent. Gallantry combined in him with a sort of ascetic self-repression in a way that was curious. He was a dozen years older than Somerset: his life had been passed in grooves remote from those of Somerset's own life; and the latter decided that he would like to meet the artillery officer again.

Bidding them a temporary farewell, he went away to Markton by a shorter path than that pursued by the De Stancys, and after spending the remainder of the afternoon preparing for departure, he sallied forth just before the dinner-hour towards the suburban villa.

He had become yet more curious whether a Mrs. De Stancy existed; if there were one he would probably see her to-night. He had an irrepressible hope that there might be such a lady. On entering the drawing-room only the father, son, and daughter were assembled. Somerset fell into talk with Charlotte during the few minutes before dinner, and his thought found its way out.

'There is no Mrs. De Stancy?' he said in an undertone.

'None,' she said; 'my brother is a bachelor.'

The dinner having been fixed at an early hour to suit Somerset, they had returned to the drawing-room at eight o'clock. About nine he was aiming to get away.

'You are not off yet?' said the captain.

'There would have been no hurry,' said Somerset, 'had I not just remembered that I have left one thing undone which I want to attend to before my departure. I want to see the chief constable to-night.'

'Cunningham Haze?—he is the very man I too want to see. But he went out of town this afternoon, and I hardly think you will see him to-night. His return has been delayed.'

'Then the matter must wait.'

'I have left word at his house asking him to call here if he gets home before half-past ten; but at any rate I shall see him to-morrow morning. Can I do anything for you, since you are leaving early?'

Somerset replied that the business was of no great importance, and briefly explained the suspected intrusion into his studio; that he had with him a photograph of the suspected young man. 'If it is a mistake,' added Somerset, 'I should regret putting my draughtsman's portrait into the hands of the police, since it might injure his character; indeed, it would be unfair to him. So I wish to keep the likeness in my own hands, and merely to show it to Mr. Haze: that's why I prefer not to send it.'

'My matter with Haze is that the barrack furniture does not correspond with the inventories. If you like, I'll ask your question at the same time with pleasure.'

Thereupon Somerset gave Captain De Stancy an unfastened envelope containing the portrait, asking him to destroy it if the constable should declare it not to correspond with the face that met his eye at the window. Soon after, Somerset took his leave of the household.

He had not been absent ten minutes when other

wheels were heard on the gravel without, and the servant announced Mr. Cunningham Haze, who had returned earlier than he had expected, and had called as requested.

They went into the dining-room to discuss their business. When the barrack matter had been arranged De Stancy said, 'I have a little commission to execute for my friend Mr. Somerset. I am to ask you if this portrait of the person he suspects of unlawfully entering his room is like the man you saw there?'

The speaker was seated on one side of the dining-table and Mr. Haze on the other. As he spoke De Stancy pulled the envelope from his pocket, and half drew out the photograph, which he had not as yet looked at, to hand it over to the constable. In the act his eye fell upon the portrait, with its uncertain expression of age, assured look, and hair worn in a fringe like a girl's.

Captain De Stancy's face became strained, and he leant back in his chair, having previously had sufficient power over himself to close the envelope and return it to his pocket.

'Good heavens, you are ill, Captain De Stancy?' said the chief constable.

'It was only momentary,' said De Stancy; 'better in a minute—a glass of water will put me right.'

Mr. Haze got him a glass of water from the sideboard.

'These spasms occasionally overtake me,' said De Stancy when he had drunk. 'I am already better. What were we saying? O, this affair of Mr. Somerset's. I find that this envelope is not the right one.' He ostensibly searched his pocket again. 'I must have mislaid it,' he continued, rising. 'I'll be with you again in a moment.'

De Stancy went into the room adjoining, opened an album of portraits that lay on the table, and selected

one of a young man quite unknown to him, whose age was somewhat akin to Dare's, but who in no other attribute resembled him.

De Stancy placed this picture in the original envelope, and returned with it to the chief constable, saying he had found it at last.

'Thank you, thank you,' said Cunningham Haze, looking it over. 'Ah—I perceive it is not what I expected to see. 'Mr. Somerset was mistaken.'

When the chief constable had left the house, Captain De Stancy shut the door and drew out the original photograph. As he looked at the transcript of Dare's features he was moved by a painful agitation, till recalling himself to the present, he carefully put the portrait into the fire.

During the following days Captain De Stancy's manner on the roads, in the streets, and at barracks, was that of Crusoe after seeing the print of a man's foot on the sand.

V

ANYBODY who had closely considered Dare at this time would have discovered that, shortly after the arrival of the Royal Horse Artillery at Markton Barracks, he gave up his room at the inn at Sleeping-Green and took permanent lodgings over a broker's shop in the town above-mentioned. The peculiarity of the rooms was that they commanded a view lengthwise of the barrack lane along which any soldier, in the natural course of things, would pass either to enter the town, to call at Myrtle Villa, or to go to Stancy Castle.

Dare seemed to act as if there were plenty of time for his business. Some few days had slipped by when, perceiving Captain De Stancy walk past his window and into the town, Dare took his hat and cane, and followed in the same direction. When he was about fifty yards short of Myrtle Villa on the other side of the town he saw De Stancy enter its gate.

Dare mounted a stile beside the highway and patiently waited. In about twenty minutes De Stancy came out again and turned back in the direction of the town, till Dare was revealed to him on his left hand. When De Stancy recognized the youth he was visibly agitated, though apparently not surprised. Standing still a moment he dropped his glance upon the ground,

and then came forward to Dare, who having alighted from the stile stood before the captain with a smile.

'My dear lad!' said De Stancy, much moved by recollections. He held Dare's hand for a moment in both his own, and turned askance.

'You are not astonished,' said Dare, still retaining his smile, as if to his mind there were something comic in the situation.

'I knew you were somewhere near. Where do you come from?'

'From going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it, as Satan said to his Maker.—Southampton last, in common speech.'

'Have you come here to see me?'

'Entirely. I divined that your next quarters would be Markton, the previous batteries that were at your station having come on here. I have wanted to see you badly.'

'You have?'

'I am rather out of cash. I have been knocking about a good deal since you last heard from me.'

'I will do what I can again.'

'Thanks, captain.'

'But, Willy, I am afraid it will not be much at present. You know I am as poor as a mouse.'

'But such as it is, could you write a cheque for it now?'

'I will send it to you from the barracks.'

'I have a better plan. By getting over this stile we could go round at the back of the villas to Sleeping-Green Church. There is always a pen-and-ink in the vestry, and we can have a nice talk on the way. It would be unwise for me to appear at the barracks just now.'

'That's true.'

De Stancy sighed, and they were about to walk across the fields together. 'No,' said Dare, suddenly stopping:

'my plans make it imperative that we should not run the risk of being seen in each other's company for long. Walk on, and I will follow. You can stroll into the churchyard, and move about as if you were ruminating on the epitaphs. There are some with excellent morals. I'll enter by the other gate, and we can meet easily in the vestry-room.'

De Stancy looked gloomy, and was on the point of acquiescing when he turned back and said, 'Why should your photograph be shown to the chief constable?'

'By whom?'

'Somerset the architect. He suspects your having broken into his office or something of the sort.' De Stancy briefly related what Somerset had explained to him at the dinner-table.

'It was merely diamond cut diamond between us, on an architectural matter,' murmured Dare. 'Ho! and he suspects; and that's his remedy!'

'I hope this is nothing serious?' asked De Stancy gravely.

'I peeped at his drawing—that's all. But since he chooses to make that use of my photograph, which I gave him in friendship, I'll make use of his in a way he little dreams of. Well now, let's on.'

A quarter of an hour later they met in the vestry of the church at Sleeping-Green.

'I have only just transferred my account to the bank here,' said De Stancy, as he took out his cheque-book, 'and it will be more convenient to me at present to draw but a small sum. I will make up the balance afterwards.'

When he had written it Dare glanced over the paper and said ruefully, 'It is small, dad. Well, there is all the more reason why I should broach my scheme, with a view to making such documents larger in the future.'

'I shall be glad to hear of any such scheme,' answered De Stancy, with a languid attempt at jocularity.

'Then here it is. The plan I have arranged for you is of the nature of a marriage.'

'You are very kind!' said De Stancy, agape.

'The lady's name is Miss Paula Power, who, as you may have heard since your arrival, is in absolute possession of her father's property and estates, including Stancy Castle. As soon as I heard of her I saw what a marvellous match it would be for you, and your family; it would make a man of you, in short, and I have set my mind upon your putting no objection in the way of its accomplishment.'

'But, Willy, it seems to me that, of us two, it is you who exercise paternal authority?'

'True, it is for your good. Let me do it.'

'Well, one must be indulgent under the circumstances, I suppose. . . . But,' added De Stancy simply, 'Willy, I — don't want to marry, you know. I have lately thought that some day we may be able to live together, you and I: go off to America or New Zealand, where we are not known, and there lead a quiet, pastoral life, defying social rules and troublesome observances.'

'I can't hear of it, captain,' replied Dare reprovingly. 'I am what events have made me, and having fixed my mind upon getting you settled in life by this marriage, I have put things in train for it at an immense trouble to myself. If you had thought over it o' nights as much as I have, you would not say nay.'

'But I ought to have married your mother if anybody. And as I have not married her, the least I can do in respect to her is to marry no other woman.'

'You have some sort of duty to me, have you not, Captain De Stancy?'

'Yes, Willy, I admit that I have,' the elder replied reflectively. 'And I don't think I have failed in it thus far?'

'This will be the crowning proof. Paternal affection, family pride, the noble instincts to reinstate yourself in

the castle of your ancestors, all demand the step. And when you have seen the lady! She has the figure and motions of a sylph, the face of an angel, the eye of love itself. What a sight she is crossing the lawn on a sunny afternoon, or gliding airily along the corridors of the old place the De Stancys knew so well! Her lips are the softest, reddest, most distracting things you ever saw. Her hair is as soft as silk, and of the rarest, tenderest brown.'

The captain moved uneasily. 'Don't take the trouble to say more, Willy,' he observed. 'You know how I am. My cursed susceptibility to these matters has already wasted years of my life, and I don't want to make myself a fool about her too.'

'You must see her.'

'No, don't let me see her,' De Stancy expostulated. 'If she is only half so good-looking as you say, she will drag me at her heels like a blind Samson. You are a mere youth as yet, but I may tell you that the misfortune of never having been my own master where a beautiful face was concerned obliges me to be cautious if I would preserve my peace of mind.'

'Well, to my mind, Captain De Stancy, your objections seem trivial. Are those all?'

'They are all I care to mention just now to you.'

'Captain! can there be secrets between us?'

De Stancy paused and looked at the lad as if his heart wished to confess what his judgment feared to tell. 'There should not be—on this point,' he murmured.

'Then tell me—why do you so much object to her?'

'I once vowed a vow.'

'A vow!' said Dare, rather disconcerted.

'A vow of infinite solemnity. I must tell you from the beginning; perhaps you are old enough to hear it now, though you have been too young before. Your mother's life ended in much sorrow, and it was occa-

sioned entirely by me. In my regret for the wrong done her I swore to her that though she had not been my wife, no other woman should stand in that relationship to me; and this to her was a sort of comfort. When she was dead my knowledge of my own plaguy impressionableness, which seemed to be ineradicable—as it seems still—led me to think what safeguards I could set over myself with a view to keeping my promise to live a life of celibacy; and among other things I determined to forswear the society, and if possible the sight, of women young and attractive, as far as I had the power to do.'

'It is not so easy to avoid the sight of a beautiful woman if she crosses your path, I should think?'

'It is not easy; but it is possible.'

'How?'

'By directing your attention another way.'

'But do you mean to say, captain, that you can be in a room with a pretty woman who speaks to you, and not look at her?'

'I do: though mere looking has less to do with it than mental attentiveness—allowing your thoughts to flow out in her direction—to comprehend her image.'

'But it would be considered very impolite not to look at the woman or comprehend her image?'

'It would, and is. I am considered the most impolite officer in the service. I have been nicknamed the man with the averted eyes—the man with the detestable habit—the man who greets you with his shoulder, and so on. Ninety-and-nine fair women at the present moment hate me like poison and death for having persistently refused to plumb the depths of their offered eyes.'

'How can you do it, who are by nature courteous?'

'I cannot always—I break down sometimes. But, upon the whole, recollection holds me to it: dread of a lapse. Nothing is so potent as fear well maintained.'

De Stancy narrated these details in a grave meditatative tone with his eyes on the wall, as if he were scarcely conscious of a listener.

'But haven't you reckless moments, captain?—when you have taken a little more wine than usual, for instance?'

'I don't take wine.'

'O, you are a teetotaller?'

'Not a pledged one—but I don't touch alcohol unless I get wet, or anything of that sort.'

'Don't you sometimes forget this vow of yours to my mother?'

'No, I wear a reminder.'

'What is that like?'

De Stancy held up his left hand, on the third finger of which appeared an iron ring.

Dare surveyed it, saying, 'Yes, I have seen that before, though I never knew why you wore it. Well, I wear a reminder also, but of a different sort.'

He threw open his shirt-front, and revealed tattooed on his breast the letters DE STANCY; the same marks which Havill had seen in the bedroom by the light of the moon.

The captain rather winced at the sight. 'Well, well,' he said hastily, 'that's enough. . . . Now, at any rate, you understand my objection to know Miss Power.'

'But, captain,' said the lad coaxingly, as he fastened his shirt; 'you forget me and the good you may do me by marrying? Surely that's a sufficient reason for a change of sentiment. This inexperienced sweet creature owns the castle and estate which bears your name, even to the furniture and pictures. She is the possessor of at least forty thousand a year—how much more I cannot say—while, buried here in Outer Wessex, she lives at the rate of twelve hundred in her simplicity.'

'It is very good of you to set this before me. But I prefer to go on as I am going.'

'Well, I won't bore you any more with her to-day. A monk in regimentals!—'tis strange.' Dare arose and was about to open the door, when, looking through the window, Captain De Stancy said, 'Stop.' He had perceived his father, Sir William De Stancy, walking among the tombstones without.

'Yes, indeed,' said Dare, turning the key in the door. 'It would look strange if he were to find us here.'

As the old man seemed indisposed to leave the churchyard just yet they sat down again.

'What a capital card-table this green cloth would make,' said Dare, as they waited. 'You play, captain, I suppose?'

'Very seldom.'

'The same with me. But as I enjoy a hand of cards with a friend, I don't go unprovided.' Saying which, Dare drew a pack from the tail of his coat. 'Shall we while away this leisure with the witching things?'

'Really, I'd rather not.'

'But,' coaxed the young man, 'I am in the humour for it; so don't be unkind!'

'But, Willy, why do you care for these things? Cards are harmless enough in their way; but I don't like to see you carrying them in your pocket. It isn't good for you.'

'It was by the merest chance I had them. Now come, just one hand, since we are prisoners. I want to show you how nicely I can play. I won't corrupt you!'

'Of course not,' said De Stancy, as if ashamed of what his objection implied. 'You are not corrupt enough yourself to do that, I should hope.'

The cards were dealt and they began to play—Captain De Stancy abstractedly, and with his eyes mostly straying out of the window upon the large yew, whose boughs as they moved were distorted by the old green window-panes.

'It is better than doing nothing,' said Dare cheerfully, as the game went on. 'I hope you don't dislike it?'

'Not if it pleases you,' said De Stancy listlessly.

'And the consecration of this place does not extend further than the aisle wall.'

'Doesn't it?' said De Stancy, as he mechanically played out his cards. 'What became of that box of books I sent you with my last cheque?'

'Well, as I hadn't time to read them, and as I knew you would not like them to be wasted, I sold them to a bloke who peruses them from morning till night. Ah, now you have lost a fiver altogether—how queer! We'll double the stakes. So, as I was saying, just at the time the books came I got an inkling of this important business, and literature went to the wall.'

'Important business—what?'

'The capture of this lady, to be sure.'

De Stancy sighed impatiently. 'I wish you were less calculating, and had more of the impulse natural to your years!'

'Game—by Jove! You have lost again, captain. That makes — let me see — nine pounds fifteen to square us.'

'I owe you that?' said De Stancy, startled. 'It is more than I have in cash. I must write another cheque.'

'Never mind. Make it payable to yourself, and our connection will be quite unsuspected.'

Captain De Stancy did as requested, and rose from his seat. Sir William, though further off, was still in the churchyard.

'How can you hesitate for a moment about this girl?' said Dare, pointing to the bent figure of the old man. 'Think of the satisfaction it would be to him to see his son within the family walls again. It should be a religion with you to compass such a legitimate end as this.'

'Well, well, I'll think of it,' said the captain, with an

impatient laugh. 'You are quite a Mephistopheles, Will—I say it to my sorrow!'

'Would that I were in your place.'

'Would that you were! Fifteen years ago I might have called the chance a magnificent one.'

'But you are a young man still, and you look younger than you are. Nobody knows our relationship, and I am not such a fool as to divulge it. Of course, if through me you reclaim this splendid possession, I should leave it to your feelings what you would do for me.'

Sir William had by this time cleared out of the churchyard, and the pair emerged from the vestry and departed. Proceeding towards Markton by the same by-path, they presently came to an eminence covered with bushes of blackthorn, and tufts of yellowing fern. From this point a good view of the woods and glades about Stancy Castle could be obtained. Dare stood still on the top and stretched out his finger; the captain's eye followed the direction, and he saw above the many-hued foliage in the middle distance the towering keep of Paula's castle.

'That's the goal of your ambition, captain—ambition do I say?—most righteous and dutiful endeavour! How the hoary shape catches the sunlight—it is the *raison d'être* of the landscape, and its possession is coveted by a thousand hearts. Surely it is an hereditary desire of yours? You must make a point of returning to it, and appearing in the map of the future as in that of the past. I delight in this work of encouraging you, and pushing you forward towards your own. You are really very clever, you know, but—I say it with respect—how comes it that you want so much waking up?'

'Because I know the day is not so bright as it seems, my boy. However, you make a little mistake. If I care for anything on earth, I do care for that old fortress of my forefathers. I respect so little among the

living that all my reverence is for my own dead. But manœuvring, even for my own, as you call it, is not in my line. It is distasteful—it is positively hateful to me.'

'Well, well, let it stand thus for the present. But will you refuse me one little request—merely to see her? I'll contrive it so that she may not see you. Don't refuse me, it is the one thing I ask, and I shall think it hard if you deny me.'

'O Will!' said the captain wearily. 'Why will you plead so? No—even though your mind is particularly set upon it, I cannot see her, or bestow a thought upon her, much as I should like to gratify you.'

VI

WHEN they had parted Dare walked along towards Markton with resolve on his mouth and an unscrupulous light in his prominent black eye. Could any person who had heard the previous conversation have seen him now, he would have found little difficulty in divining that, notwithstanding De Stancy's obduracy, the reinstation of Captain De Stancy in the castle, and the possible legitimation and enrichment of himself, was still the dream of his brain. Even should any legal settlement or offspring intervene to nip the extreme development of his projects, there was abundant opportunity for his glorification. Two conditions were imperative. De Stancy must see Paula before Somerset's return. And it was necessary to have help from Havill, even if it involved letting him know all.

Whether Havill already knew all was a nice question for Mr. Dare's luminous mind. Havill had had opportunities of reading his secret, particularly on the night they occupied the same room. If so, by revealing it to Paula, Havill might utterly blast his project for the marriage. Havill, then, was at all risks to be retained as an ally.

Yet Dare would have preferred a stronger check upon his confederate than was afforded by his own knowledge of that anonymous letter and the competition trick. For

were the competition lost to him, Havill would have no further interest in conciliating Miss Power; would as soon as not let her know the secret of De Stancy's relation to him.

Fortune as usual helped him in his dilemma. Entering Havill's office, Dare found him sitting there; but the drawings had all disappeared from the boards. The architect held an open letter in his hand.

'Well, what news?' said Dare.

'Miss Power has returned to the castle, Somerset is detained in London, and the competition is decided,' said Havill, with a glance of quiet dubiousness.

'And you have won it?'

'No. We are bracketed—it's a tie. The judges say there is no choice between the designs—that they are singularly equal and singularly good. That she would do well to adopt either. Signed So-and-So, Fellows of the Royal Institute of British Architects. The result is that she will employ which she personally likes best. It is as if I had spun a sovereign in the air and it had alighted on its edge. The least false movement will make it tails; the least wise movement heads.'

'Singularly equal. Well, we owe that to our nocturnal visit, which must not be known.'

'O Lord, no!' said Havill apprehensively.

Dare felt secure of him at those words. Havill had much at stake; the slightest rumour of his trick in bringing about the competition would be fatal to Havill's reputation.

'The permanent absence of Somerset then is desirable architecturally on your account, matrimonially on mine.'

'Matrimonially? By the way—who was that captain you pointed out to me when the artillery entered the town?'

'Captain De Stancy—son of Sir William De Stancy.

He s the husband. O you needn't look incredulous: it is practicable; but we won't argue that. In the first place I want him to see her, and to see her in the most love-kindling, passion-begetting circumstances that can be thought of. And he must see her surreptitiously, for he refuses to meet her.'

'Let him see her going to church or chapel?'

Dare shook his head.

'Driving out?'

'Common-place!'

'Walking in the gardens?'

'Ditto.'

'At her toilet?'

'Ah—if it were possible!'

'Which it hardly is. Well, you had better think it over and make inquiries about her habits, and as to when she is in a favourable aspect for observation, as the almanacs say.'

Shortly afterwards Dare took his leave. In the evening he made it his business to sit smoking on the bole of a tree which commanded a view of the upper ward of the castle, and also of the old postern-gate, now enlarged and used as a tradesmen's entrance. It was half-past six o'clock; the dressing-bell rang, and Dare saw a light-footed young woman hasten at the sound across the ward from the servants' quarter. A light appeared in a chamber which he knew to be Paula's dressing-room; and there it remained half-an-hour, a shadow passing and repassing on the blind in the style of head-dress worn by the girl he had previously seen. The dinner-bell sounded and the light went out.

As yet it was scarcely dark out of doors, and in a few minutes Dare had the satisfaction of seeing the same woman cross the ward and emerge upon the slope without. This time she was bonneted, and carried a little basket in her hand. A nearer view showed her to be, as he had expected, Milly Birch, Paula's maid,

who had friends living in Markton, whom she was in the habit of visiting almost every evening during the three hours of leisure which intervened between Paula's retirement from the dressing-room and return thither at ten o'clock. When the young woman had descended the road and passed into the large drive, Dare rose and followed her.

'O, it is you, Miss Birch,' said Dare, on overtaking her. 'I am glad to have the pleasure of walking by your side.'

'Yes, sir. O it's Mr. Dare. We don't see you at the castle now, sir.'

'No. And do you get a walk like this every evening when the others are at their busiest?'

'Almost every evening; that's the one return to the poor lady's maid for losing her leisure when the others get it—in the absence of the family from home.'

'Is Miss Power a hard mistress?'

'No.'

'Rather fanciful than hard, I presume?'

'Just so, sir.'

'And she likes to appear to advantage, no doubt.'

'I suppose so,' said Milly, laughing. 'We all do.'

'When does she appear to the best advantage? When riding, or driving, or reading her book?'

'Not altogether then, if you mean the very best.'

'Perhaps it is when she sits looking in the glass at herself, and you let down her hair.'

'Not particularly, to my mind.'

'When does she to your mind? When dressed for a dinner-party or ball?'

'She's middling, then. But there is one time when she looks nicer and cleverer than at any. It is when she is in the gymnasium.'

'O—gymnasium?'

'Because when she is there she wears such a pretty boy's costume, and is so charming in her movements,

that you think she is a lovely young youth and not a girl at all.'

'When does she go to this gymnasium?'

'Not so much as she used to. Only on wet mornings now, when she can't get out for walks or drives. But she used to do it every day.'

'I should like to see her there.'

'Why, sir?'

'I am a poor artist, and can't afford models. To see her attitudes would be of great assistance to me in the art I love so well.'

Milly shook her head. 'She's very strict about the door being locked. If I were to leave it open she would dismiss me, as I should deserve.'

'But consider, dear Miss Birch, the advantage to a poor artist the sight of her would be: if you could hold the door ajar it would be worth five pounds to me, and a good deal to you.'

'No,' said the incorruptible Milly, shaking her head. 'Besides, I don't always go there with her. O no, I couldn't!'

Milly remained so firm at this point that Dare said no more.

When he had left her he returned to the castle grounds, and though there was not much light he had no difficulty in discovering the gymnasium, the outside of which he had observed before, without thinking to inquire its purpose. Like the erections in other parts of the shrubberies it was constructed of wood, the interstices between the framing being filled up with short billets of fir nailed diagonally. Dare, even when without a settled plan in his head, could arrange for probabilities; and wrenching out one of the billets he looked inside. It seemed to be a simple oblong apartment, fitted up with ropes, with a little dressing-closet at one end, and lighted by a skylight or lantern in the roof. Dare replaced the wood and went on his way.

Havill was smoking on his doorstep when Dare passed up the street. He held up his hand.

'Since you have been gone,' said the architect, 'I've hit upon something that may help you in exhibiting your lady to your gentleman. In the summer I had orders to design a gymnasium for her, which I did; and they say she is very clever on the ropes and bars. Now——'

'I've discovered it. I shall contrive for him to see her there on the first wet morning, which is when she practises. What made her think of it?'

'As you may have heard, she holds advanced views on social and other matters; and in those on the higher education of women she is very strong, talking a good deal about the physical training of the Greeks, whom she adores, or did. Every philosopher and man of science who ventilates his theories in the monthly reviews has a devout listener in her; and this subject of the physical development of her sex has had its turn with other things in her mind. So she had the place built on her very first arrival, according to the latest lights on athletics, and in imitation of those at the new colleges for women.'

'How deuced clever of the girl! She means to live to be a hundred.'

VII

THE wet day arrived with all the promptness that might have been expected of it in this land of rains and mists. The alder bushes behind the gymnasium dripped monotonously leaf upon leaf, added to this being the purl of the shallow stream a little way off, producing a sense of satiety in watery sounds. Though there was drizzle in the open meads, the rain here in the thicket was comparatively slight, and two men with fishing tackle who stood beneath one of the larger bushes found its boughs a sufficient shelter.

'We may as well walk home again as study nature here, Willy,' said the taller and elder of the twain. 'I feared it would continue when we started. The magnificent sport you speak of must rest for to-day.'

The other looked at his watch, but made no particular reply.

'Come, let us move on. I don't like intruding into other people's grounds like this,' De Stancy continued.

'We are not intruding. Anybody walks outside this fence.' He indicated an iron railing newly tarred, dividing the wilder underwood amid which they stood from the inner and well-kept parts of the shrubbery, and against which the back of the gymnasium was built.

Light footsteps upon a gravel walk could be heard on the other side of the fence, and a trio of cloaked and

umbrella-screened figures were for a moment discernible. They vanished behind the gymnasium; and again nothing resounded but the river murmurs and the clock-like drippings of the leafage.

'Hush!' said Dare.

'No pranks, my boy,' said De Stancy suspiciously. 'You should be above them.'

'And you should trust to my good sense, captain,' Dare remonstrated. 'I have not indulged in a prank since the sixth year of my pilgrimage: I have found them too damaging to my interests. Well, it is not too dry here, and damp injures your health, you say. Have a pull for safety's sake.' He presented a flask to De Stancy.

The artillery officer looked down at his nether garments.

'I don't break my rule without good reason,' he observed.

'I am afraid that reason exists at present.'

'I am afraid it does. What have you got?'

'Only a little wine.'

'What wine?'

'Do try it. I call it "the blushful Hippocrene," that the poet describes as

> "'Tasting of Flora and the country green;
> Dance, and Provençal song, and sun-burnt mirth."'

De Stancy took the flask, and drank a little.

'It warms, does it not?' said Dare.

'Too much,' said De Stancy with misgiving. 'I have been taken unawares. Why, it is three parts brandy, to my taste, you scamp!'

Dare put away the wine. 'Now you are to see something,' he said.

'Something—what is it?' Captain De Stancy regarded him with a puzzled look.

'It is quite a curiosity, and really worth seeing. Now just look in here.'

The speaker advanced to the back of the building, and withdrew the wood billet from the wall.

'Will, I believe you are up to some trick,' said De Stancy, not, however, suspecting the actual truth in these unsuggestive circumstances, and with a comfortable resignation, produced by the potent liquor, which would have been comical to an outsider, but which, to one who had known the history and relationship of the two speakers, would have worn a sadder significance. 'I am too big a fool about you to keep you down as I ought; that's the fault of me, worse luck.'

He pressed the youth's hand with a smile, went forward, and looked through the hole into the interior of the gymnasium. Dare withdrew to some little distance, and watched Captain De Stancy's face, which presently began to assume an expression of interest.

What was the captain seeing? A sort of optical poem.

Paula, in a pink flannel costume, was bending, wheeling and undulating in the air like a gold-fish in its globe, sometimes ascending by her arms nearly to the lantern, then lowering herself till she swung level with the floor. Her aunt Mrs. Goodman, and Charlotte De Stancy, were sitting on camp-stools at one end, watching her gyrations, Paula occasionally addressing them with such an expression as—'Now, Aunt, look at me—and you, Charlotte—is not that shocking to your weak nerves,' when some adroit feat would be repeated, which, however, seemed to give much more pleasure to Paula herself in performing it than to Mrs. Goodman in looking on, the latter sometimes saying, 'O, it is terrific—do not run such a risk again!'

It would have demanded the poetic passion of some joyous Elizabethan lyrist like Lodge, Nash, or Constable, to fitly phrase Paula's presentation of herself at this

moment of absolute abandonment to every muscular whim that could take possession of such a supple form. The white manilla ropes clung about the performer like snakes as she took her exercise, and the colour in her face deepened as she went on. Captain De Stancy felt that, much as he had seen in early life of beauty in woman, he had never seen beauty of such a real and living sort as this. A recollection of his vow, together with a sense that to gaze on the festival of this Bona Dea was, though so innocent and pretty a sight, hardly fair or gentlemanly, would have compelled him to withdraw his eyes, had not the sportive fascination of her appearance glued them there in spite of all. And as if to complete the picture of Grace personified and add the one thing wanting to the charm which bound him, the clouds, till that time thick in the sky, broke away from the upper heaven, and allowed the noonday sun to pour down through the lantern upon her, irradiating her with a warm light that was incarnadined by her pink doublet and hose, and reflected in upon her face. She only required a cloud to rest on instead of the green silk net which actually supported her reclining figure for the moment, to be quite Olympian; save indeed that in place of haughty effrontery there sat on her countenance only the healthful sprightliness of an English girl.

Dare had withdrawn to a point at which another path crossed the path occupied by De Stancy. Looking in a side direction, he saw Havill idling slowly up to him over the silent grass. Havill's knowledge of the appointment had brought him out to see what would come of it. When he neared Dare, but was still partially hidden by the boughs from the third of the party, the former simply pointed to De Stancy, upon which Havill stood and peeped at him. 'Is she within there?' he inquired.

Dare nodded, and whispered, 'You need not have asked, if you had examined his face.'

'That's true.'

'A fermentation is beginning in him,' said Dare, half pitifully; 'a purely chemical process; and when it is complete he will probably be clear, and fiery, and sparkling, and quite another man than the good, weak, easy fellow that he was.'

To precisely describe Captain De Stancy's admiration was impossible. A sun seemed to rise in his face. By watching him they could almost see the aspect of her within the wall, so accurately were her changing phases reflected in him. He seemed to forget that he was not alone.

'And is this,' he murmured, in the manner of one only half apprehending himself, 'and is this the end of my vow?'

Paula was saying at this moment, 'Ariel sleeps in this posture, does he not, Auntie?' Suiting the action to the word she flung out her arms behind her head as she lay in the green silk hammock, idly closed her pink eyelids, and swung herself to and fro.

BOOK THE THIRD

DE STANCY

BOOK THE THIRD

DE STANCY

I

CAPTAIN DE STANCY was a changed man. A hitherto well-repressed energy was giving him motion towards long-shunned consequences. His features were, indeed, the same as before; though, had a physiognomist chosen to study them with the closeness of an astronomer scanning the universe, he would doubtless have discerned abundant novelty.

In recent years De Stancy had been an easy, melancholy, unaspiring officer, enervated and depressed by a parental affection quite beyond his control for the graceless lad Dare—the obtrusive memento of a shadowy period in De Stancy's youth, who threatened to be the curse of his old age. Throughout a long space he had persevered in his system of rigidly incarcerating within himself all instincts towards the opposite sex, with a resolution that would not have disgraced a much stronger man. By this habit, maintained with fair success, a chamber of his nature had been preserved intact during many later years, like the one solitary sealed-up cell occasionally retained by bees in a lobe of drained honey-comb. And thus, though he had irretrievably exhausted the relish of society, of ambition,

of action, and of his profession, the love-force that he had kept immured alive was still a reproducible thing.

The sight of Paula in her graceful performance, which the judicious Dare had so carefully planned, led up to and heightened by subtle accessories, operated on De Stancy's surprised soul with a promptness almost magical.

On the evening of the self-same day, having dined as usual, he retired to his rooms, where he found a hamper of wine awaiting him. It had been anonymously sent, and the account was paid. He smiled grimly, but no longer with heaviness. In this he instantly recognized the handiwork of Dare, who, having at last broken down the barrier which De Stancy had erected round his heart for so many years, acted like a skilled strategist, and took swift measures to follow up the advantage so tardily gained.

Captain De Stancy knew himself conquered: he knew he should yield to Paula—had indeed yielded; but there was now, in his solitude, an hour or two of reaction. He did not drink from the bottles sent. He went early to bed, and lay tossing thereon till far into the night, thinking over the collapse. His teetotalism had, with the lapse of years, unconsciously become the outward and visible sign to himself of his secret vows; and a return to its opposite, however mildly done, signified with ceremonious distinctness the formal acceptance of delectations long forsworn.

But the exceeding freshness of his feeling for Paula, which by reason of its long arrest was that of a man far under thirty, and was a wonder to himself every instant, would not long brook weighing in balances. He wished suddenly to commit himself; to remove the question of retreat out of the region of debate. The clock struck two: and the wish became determination. He arose, and wrapping himself in his dressing-gown went to the next room, where he took from a shelf in the pantry

several large bottles, which he carried to the window, till they stood on the sill a goodly row. There had been sufficient light in the room for him to do this without a candle. Now he softly opened the sash, and the radiance of a gibbous moon riding in the opposite sky flooded the apartment. It fell on the labels of the captain's bottles, revealing their contents to be simple aërated waters for drinking.

De Stancy looked out and listened. The guns that stood drawn up within the yard glistened in the moonlight reaching them from over the barrack-wall: there was an occasional stamp of horses in the stables; also a measured tread of sentinels—one or more at the gates, one at the hospital, one between the wings, two at the magazine, and others further off. Recurring to his intention he drew the corks of the mineral waters, and inverting each bottle one by one over the window-sill, heard its contents dribble in a small stream on to the gravel below.

He then opened the hamper which Dare had sent. Uncorking one of the bottles he murmured, 'To Paula!' and drank a glass of the ruby liquor.

'A man again after eighteen years,' he said, shutting the sash and returning to his bedroom.

The first overt result of his kindled interest in Miss Power was his saying to his sister the day after the surreptitious sight of Paula: 'I am sorry, Charlotte, for a word or two I said the other day.'

'Well?'

'I was rather disrespectful to your friend Miss Power.'

'I don't think so—were you?'

'Yes. When we were walking in the wood, I made a stupid joke about her. . . . What does she know about me—do you ever speak of me to her?

'Only in general terms.'

'What general terms?'

'You know well enough, William; of your idiosyncrasies and so on—that you are a bit of a woman-hater, or at least a confirmed bachelor, and have but little respect for your own family.'

'I wish you had not told her that,' said De Stancy with dissatisfaction.

'But I thought you always liked women to know your principles!' said Charlotte, in injured tones; 'and would particularly like her to know them, living so near.'

'Yes, yes,' replied her brother hastily. 'Well, I ought to see her, just to show her that I am not quite a brute.'

'That would be very nice!' she answered, putting her hands together in agreeable astonishment. 'It is just what I have wished, though I did not dream of suggesting it after what I have heard you say. I am going to stay with her again to-morrow, and I will let her know about this.'

'Don't tell her anything plainly, for heaven's sake. I really want to see the interior of the castle; I have never entered its walls since my babyhood.' He raised his eyes as he spoke to where the walls in question showed their ashlar faces over the trees.

'You might have gone over it at any time.'

'O yes. It is only recently that I have thought much of the place: I feel now that I should like to examine the old building thoroughly, since it was for so many generations associated with our fortunes, especially as most of the old furniture is still there. My sedulous avoidance hitherto of all relating to our family vicissitudes has been, I own, stupid conduct for an intelligent being; but impossible grapes are always sour, and I have unconsciously adopted Radical notions to obliterate disappointed hereditary instincts. But these have a trick of re-establishing themselves as one gets older, and the castle and what it contains have a keen interest for me now.'

'It contains Paula.'

De Stancy's pulse, which had been beating languidly for many years, beat double at the sound of that name.

'I meant furniture and pictures for the moment,' he said; 'but I don't mind extending the meaning to her, if you wish it.'

'She is the rarest thing there.'

'So you have said before.'

'The castle and our family history have as much romantic interest for her as they have for you,' Charlotte went on. 'She delights in visiting our tombs and effigies, and ponders over them for hours.'

'Indeed!' said De Stancy, allowing his surprise to hide the satisfaction which accompanied it. 'That should make us friendly. . . . Does she see many people?'

'Not many as yet. And she cannot have many staying there during the alterations.'

'Ah! yes—the alterations. Didn't you say that she has had a London architect stopping there on that account? What was he—old or young?'

'He is a young man: he has been to our house. Don't you remember you met him there?'

'What was his name?'

'Mr. Somerset.'

'O, that man! Yes, yes, I remember. . . . Hullo, Lottie!'

'What?'

'Your face is as red as a peony. Now I know a secret!' Charlotte vainly endeavoured to hide her confusion. 'Very well,—not a word! I won't say more,' continued De Stancy good-humouredly, 'except that he seems to be a very nice fellow.'

De Stancy had turned the dialogue on to this little well-preserved secret of his sister's with sufficient outward lightness; but it had been done in instinctive concealment of the disquieting start with which he had recognized that Somerset, Dare's enemy, whom he had

intercepted in placing Dare's portrait into the hands of the chief constable, was a man beloved by his sister Charlotte. This novel circumstance might lead to a curious complication. But he was to hear more.

'He may be very nice,' replied Charlotte, with an effort, after this silence. 'But he is nothing to me, more than a very good friend.'

'There's no engagement, or thought of one between you?'

'Certainly there's not!' said Charlotte, with brave emphasis. 'It is more likely to be between Paula and him than me and him.'

De Stancy's bare military ears and closely cropped poll flushed hot. 'Miss Power and him?'

'I don't mean to say there is, because Paula denies it; but I mean that he loves Paula. That I do know.'

De Stancy was dumb. This item of news which Dare had kept from him, not knowing how far De Stancy's sense of honour might extend, was decidedly grave. Indeed, he was so greatly impressed with the fact, that he could not help saying as much aloud: 'This is very serious!'

'Why!' she murmured tremblingly, for the first leaking out of her tender and sworn secret had disabled her quite.

'Because I love Paula too.'

'What do you say, William, you?—a woman you have never seen?'

'I have seen her—by accident. And now, my dear little sis, you will be my close ally, won't you? as I will be yours, as brother and sister should be.' He placed his arm coaxingly round Charlotte's shoulder.

'O, William, how can I?' at last she stammered.

'Why, how can't you? I should say. We are both in the same ship. I love Paula, you love Mr. Somerset; it behoves both of us to see that this flirtation of theirs ends in nothing.'

'I don't like you to put it like that—that I love him — it frightens me,' murmured the girl, visibly agitated. 'I don't want to divide him from Paula; I couldn't, I wouldn't do anything to separate them. Believe me, Will, I could not! I am sorry you love there also, though I should be glad if it happened in the natural order of events that she should come round to you. But I cannot do anything to part them and make Mr. Somerset suffer. It would be *too* wrong and blamable.'

'Now, you silly Charlotte, that's just how you women fly off at a tangent. I mean nothing dishonourable in the least. Have I ever prompted you to do anything dishonourable? Fair fighting allies was all I thought off.'

Miss De Stancy breathed more freely. 'Yes, we will be that, of course; we are always that, William. But I hope I can be your ally, and be quite neutral; I would so much rather.'

'Well, I suppose it will not be a breach of your precious neutrality if you get me invited to see the castle?'

'O no!' she said brightly; 'I don't mind doing such a thing as that. Why not come with me to-morrow? I will say I am going to bring you. There will be no trouble at all.'

De Stancy readily agreed. The effect upon him of the information now acquired was to intensify his ardour tenfold, the stimulus being due to a perception that Somerset, with a little more knowledge, would hold a card which could be played with disastrous effect against himself — his relationship to Dare. Its disclosure, to a lady of such Puritan antecedents as Paula's, would probably mean her immediate severance from himself as an unclean thing.

'Is Miss Power a severe pietist, or precisian; or is she a compromising lady?' he asked abruptly.

'She is severe and uncompromising—if you mean in her judgments on morals,' said Charlotte, not quite hearing. The remark was peculiarly apposite, and De Stancy was silent.

He spent some following hours in a close study of the castle history, which till now had unutterably bored him. More particularly did he dwell over documents and notes which referred to the pedigree of his own family. He wrote out the names of all—and they were many—who had been born within those domineering walls since their first erection; of those among them who had been brought thither by marriage with the owner, and of stranger knights and gentlemen who had entered the castle by marriage with its mistress. He refreshed his memory on the strange loves and hates that had arisen in the course of the family history; on memorable attacks, and the dates of the same, the most memorable among them being the occasion on which the party represented by Paula battered down the castle walls that she was now about to mend, and, as he hoped, return in their original intact shape to the family dispossessed, by marriage with himself, its living representative.

In Sir William's villa were small engravings after many of the portraits in the castle galleries, some of them hanging in the dining-room in plain oak and maple frames, and others preserved in portfolios. De Stancy spent much of his time over these, and in getting up the romances of their originals' lives from memoirs and other records, all which stories were as great novelties to him as they could possibly be to any stranger. Most interesting to him was the life of an Edward De Stancy, who had lived just before the Civil Wars, and to whom Captain De Stancy bore a very traceable likeness. This ancestor had a mole on his cheek, black and distinct as a fly in cream; and as in the case of the first Lord Amherst's wart, and

Bennet Earl of Arlington's nose-scar, the painter had faithfully reproduced the defect on canvas. It so happened that the captain had a mole, though not exactly on the same spot of his face; and this made the resemblance still greater.

He took infinite trouble with his dress that day, showing an amount of anxiety on the matter which for him was quite abnormal. At last, when fully equipped, he set out with his sister to make the call proposed. Charlotte was rather unhappy at sight of her brother's earnest attempt to make an impression on Paula; but she could say nothing against it, and they proceeded on their way.

It was the darkest of November weather, when the days are so short that morning seems to join with evening without the intervention of noon. The sky was lined with low cloud, within whose dense substance tempests were slowly fermenting for the coming days. Even now a windy turbulence troubled the half-naked boughs, and a lonely leaf would occasionally spin downwards to rejoin on the grass the scathed multitude of its comrades which had preceded it in its fall. The river by the pavilion, in the summer so clear and purling, now slid onwards brown and thick and silent, and enlarged to double size.

II

MEANWHILE Paula was alone. Of any one else it would have been said that she must be finding the afternoon rather dreary in the quaint halls not of her forefathers: but of Miss Power it was unsafe to predicate so surely. She walked from room to room in a black velvet dress which gave decision to her outline without depriving it of softness. She occasionally clasped her hands behind her head and looked out of a window; but she more particularly bent her footsteps up and down the Long Gallery, where she had caused a large fire of logs to be kindled, in her endeavour to extend cheerfulness somewhat beyond the precincts of the sitting-rooms.

The fire glanced up on Paula, and Paula glanced down at the fire, and at the gnarled beech fuel, and at the wood-lice which ran out from beneath the bark to the extremity of the logs as the heat approached them. The low-down ruddy light spread over the dark floor like the setting sun over a moor, fluttering on the grotesque countenances of the bright andirons, and touching all the furniture on the underside.

She now and then crossed to one of the deep embrasures of the windows, to decipher some sentence from a letter she held in her hand. The daylight would have been more than sufficient for any bystander to discern

that the capitals in that letter were of the peculiar semi-gothic type affected at the time by Somerset and other young architects of his school in their epistolary correspondence. She was very possibly thinking of him, even when not reading his letter, for the expression of softness with which she perused the page was more or less with her when she appeared to examine other things.

She walked about for a little time longer, then put away the letter, looked at the clock, and thence returned to the windows, straining her eyes over the landscape without, as she murmured, 'I wish Charlotte was not so long coming!'

As Charlotte continued to keep away, Paula became less reasonable in her desires, and proceeded to wish that Somerset would arrive; then that anybody would come; then, walking towards the portraits on the wall, she flippantly asked one of those cavaliers to oblige her fancy for company by stepping down from his frame. The temerity of the request led her to prudently withdraw it almost as soon as conceived: old paintings had been said to play queer tricks in extreme cases, and the shadows this afternoon were funereal enough for anything in the shape of revenge on an intruder who embodied the antagonistic modern spirit to such an extent as she. However, Paula still stood before the picture which had attracted her; and this, by a coincidence common enough in fact, though scarcely credited in chronicles, happened to be that one of the seventeenth-century portraits of which De Stancy had studied the engraved copy at Myrtle Villa the same morning.

Whilst she remained before the picture, wondering her favourite wonder, how would she feel if this and its accompanying canvases were pictures of her own ancestors, she was surprised by a light footstep upon the carpet which covered part of the room, and turning quickly she beheld the smiling little figure of Charlotte De Stancy.

'What has made you so late?' said Paula. 'You are come to stay, of course?'

Charlotte said she had come to stay. 'But I have brought somebody with me!'

'Ah—whom?'

'My brother happened to be at home, and I have brought him.'

Miss De Stancy's brother had been so continuously absent from home in India, or elsewhere, so little spoken of, and, when spoken of, so truly though unconsciously represented as one whose interests lay wholly outside this antiquated neighbourhood, that to Paula he had been a mere nebulosity whom she had never distinctly outlined. To have him thus cohere into substance at a moment's notice lent him the novelty of a new creation.

'Is he in the drawing-room?' said Paula in a low voice.

'No, he is here. He would follow me. I hope you will forgive him.'

And then Paula saw emerge into the red beams of the dancing fire, from behind a half-drawn hanging which screened the door, the military gentleman whose acquaintance the reader has already made.

'You know the house, doubtless, Captain De Stancy?' said Paula, somewhat shyly, when he had been presented to her.

'I have never seen the inside since I was three weeks old,' replied the artillery officer gracefully; 'and hence my recollections of it are not remarkably distinct. A year or two before I was born the entail was cut off by my father and grandfather; so that I saw the venerable place only to lose it; at least, I believe that's the truth of the case. But my knowledge of the transaction is not profound, and it is a delicate point on which to question one's father.'

Paula assented, and looked at the interesting and noble figure of the man whose parents had seemingly righted themselves at the expense of wronging him.

'The pictures and furniture were sold about the same time, I think?' said Charlotte.

'Yes,' murmured De Stancy. 'They went in a mad bargain of my father with his visitor, as they sat over their wine. My father sat down as host on that occasion, and arose as guest.'

He seemed to speak with such a courteous absence of regret for the alienation, that Paula, who was always fearing that the recollection would rise as a painful shadow between herself and the De Stancys, felt reassured by his magnanimity.

De Stancy looked with interest round the gallery; seeing which Paula said she would have lights brought in a moment.

'No, please not,' said De Stancy. 'The room and ourselves are of so much more interesting a colour by this light!'

As they moved hither and thither, the various expressions of De Stancy's face made themselves picturesquely visible in the unsteady shine of the blaze. In a short time he had drawn near to the painting of the ancestor whom he so greatly resembled. When her quick eye noted the speck on the face, indicative of inherited traits strongly pronounced, a new and romantic feeling that the De Stancys had stretched out a tentacle from their genealogical tree to seize her by the hand and draw her in to their mass took possession of Paula. As has been said, the De Stancys were a family on whom the hall-mark of membership was deeply stamped, and by the present light the representative under the portrait and the representative in the portrait seemed beings not far removed. Paula was continually starting from a reverie and speaking irrelevantly, as if such reflections as those seized hold of her in spite of her natural unconcern.

When candles were brought in Captain De Stancy ardently contrived to make the pictures the theme of

conversation. From the nearest they went to the next, whereupon Paula as hostess took up one of the candlesticks and held it aloft to light up the painting. The candlestick being tall and heavy, De Stancy relieved her of it, and taking another candle in the other hand, he imperceptibly slid into the position of exhibitor rather than spectator. Thus he walked in advance, holding the two candles on high, his shadow forming a gigantic figure on the neighbouring wall, while he recited the particulars of family history pertaining to each portrait, that he had learnt up with such eager persistence during the previous four-and-twenty-hours.

'I have often wondered what could have been the history of this lady, but nobody has ever been able to tell me,' Paula observed, pointing to a Vandyck which represented a beautiful woman wearing curls across her forehead, a square-cut bodice, and a heavy pearl necklace upon the smooth expanse of her neck.

'I don't think anybody knows,' Charlotte said.

'O yes,' replied her brother promptly, seeing with enthusiasm that it was yet another opportunity for making capital of his acquired knowledge, with which he felt himself as inconveniently crammed as a candidate for a government examination. 'That lady has been largely celebrated under a fancy name, though she is comparatively little known by her own. Her parents were the chief ornaments of the almost irreproachable court of Charles the First, and were not more distinguished by their politeness and honour than by the affections and virtues which constitute the great charm of private life.'

The stock verbiage of the family memoir was somewhat apparent in this effusion; but it much impressed his listeners; and he went on to point out that from the lady's necklace was suspended a heart-shaped portrait—that of the man who broke his heart by her persistent refusal to encourage his suit. De Stancy

then led them a little further, where hung a portrait of the lover, one of his own family, who appeared in full panoply of plate mail, the pommel of his sword standing up under his elbow. The gallant captain then related how this personage of his line wooed the lady fruitlessly; how, after her marriage with another, she and her husband visited the parents of the disappointed lover, the then occupiers of the castle; how, in a fit of desperation at the sight of her, he retired to his room, where he composed some passionate verses, which he wrote with his blood, and after directing them to her ran himself through the body with his sword. Too late the lady's heart was touched by his devotion; she was ever after a melancholy woman, and wore his portrait despite her husband's prohibition. 'This,' continued De Stancy, leading them through the doorway into the hall where the coats of mail were arranged along the wall, and stopping opposite a suit which bore some resemblance to that of the portrait, 'this is his armour, as you will perceive by comparing it with the picture, and this is the sword with which he did the rash deed.'

'What unreasonable devotion!' said Paula practically. 'It was too romantic of him. She was not worthy of such a sacrifice.'

'He also is one whom they say you resemble a little in feature, I think,' said Charlotte.

'Do they?' replied De Stancy. 'I wonder if it's true.' He set down the candles, and asking the girls to withdraw for a moment, was inside the upper part of the suit of armour in incredibly quick time. Going then and placing himself in front of a low-hanging painting near the original, so as to be enclosed by the frame while covering the figure, arranging the sword as in the one above, and setting the light that it might fall in the right direction, he recalled them; when he put the question, 'Is the resemblance strong?'

He looked so much like a man of bygone times that neither of them replied, but remained curiously gazing at him. His modern and comparatively sallow complexion, as seen through the open visor, lent an ethereal ideality to his appearance which the time-stained countenance of the original warrior totally lacked.

At last Paula spoke, so stilly that she seemed a statue enunciating: 'Are the verses known that he wrote with his blood?'

'O yes, they have been carefully preserved.' Captain De Stancy, with true wooer's instinct, had committed some of them to memory that morning from the printed copy to be found in every well-ordered library. 'I fear I don't remember them all,' he said, 'but they begin in this way:—

"From one that dyeth in his discontent,
Dear Faire, receive this greeting to thee sent;
And still as oft as it is read by thee,
Then with some deep sad sigh remember mee!

O 'twas my fortune's error to vow dutie,
To one that bears defiance in her beautie!
Sweete poyson, pretious wooe, infectious jewell—
Such is a Ladie that is faire and cruell.

How well could I with ayre, camelion-like,
Live happie, and still gazeing on thy cheeke,
In which, forsaken man, methink I see
How goodlie love doth threaten cares to mee.

Why dost thou frowne thus on a kneelinge soule,
Whose faults in love thou may'st as well controule?—
In love—but O, that word; that word I feare
Is hateful still both to thy hart and eare!

. . . . . .

Ladie, in breefe, my fate doth now intend
The period of my daies to have an end:
Waste not on me thy pittie, pretious Faire:
Rest you in much content; I, in despaire!"'

A solemn silence followed the close of the recital, which De Stancy improved by turning the point of the sword to his breast, resting the pommel upon the floor, and saying:—

'After writing that we may picture him turning this same sword in this same way, and falling on it thus.' He inclined his body forward as he spoke.

'Don't, Captain De Stancy, please don't!' cried Paula involuntarily.

'No, don't show us any further, William!' said his sister. 'It is too tragic.'

De Stancy put away the sword, himself rather excited —not, however, by his own recital, but by the direct gaze of Paula at him.

This Protean quality of De Stancy's, by means of which he could assume the shape and situation of almost any ancestor at will, had impressed her, and he perceived it with a throb of fervour. But it had done no more than impress her; for though in delivering the lines he had so fixed his look upon her as to suggest, to any maiden practised in the game of the eyes, a present significance in the words, the idea of any such *arrière-pensée* had by no means commended itself to her soul.

At this time a messenger from Markton barracks arrived at the castle and wished to speak to Captain De Stancy in the hall. Begging the two ladies to excuse him for a moment, he went out.

While De Stancy was talking in the twilight to the messenger at one end of the apartment, some other arrival was shown in by the side door, and in making his way after the conference across the hall to the room he had previously quitted, De Stancy encountered the new-comer. There was just enough light to reveal the countenance to be Dare's; he bore a portfolio under his arm, and had begun to wear a moustache, in case the chief constable should meet him anywhere in his

rambles, and be struck by his resemblance to the man in the studio.

'What the devil are you doing here?' said Captain De Stancy, in tones he had never used before to the young man.

Dare started back in surprise, and naturally so. De Stancy, having adopted a new system of living, and relinquished the meagre diet and enervating waters of his past years, was rapidly recovering tone. His voice was firmer, his cheeks were less pallid; and above all he was authoritative towards his present companion, whose ingenuity in vamping up a being for his ambitious experiments seemed about to be rewarded, like Frankenstein's, by his discomfiture at the hands of his own creature.

'What the devil are you doing here, I say?' repeated De Stancy.

'You can talk to me like that, after my working so hard to get you on in life, and make a rising man of you!' expostulated Dare, as one who felt himself no longer the leader in this enterprise.

'But,' said the captain less harshly, 'if you let them discover any relations between us here, you will ruin the fairest prospects man ever had!'

'O, I like that, captain—when you owe all of it to me!'

'That's too cool, Will.'

'No; what I say is true. However, let that go. So now you are here on a call; but how are you going to get here often enough to win her before the other man comes back? If you don't see her every day—twice, three times a day — you will not capture her in the time.'

'I must think of that,' said De Stancy.

'There is only one way of being constantly here: you must come to copy the pictures or furniture, something in the way he did.'

'I'll think of it,' muttered De Stancy hastily, as he heard the voices of the ladies, whom he hastened to join as they were appearing at the other end of the room. His countenance was gloomy as he recrossed the hall, for Dare's words on the shortness of his opportunities had impressed him. Almost at once he uttered a hope to Paula that he might have further chance of studying, and if possible of copying, some of the ancestral faces with which the building abounded.

Meanwhile Dare had come forward with his portfolio, which proved to be full of photographs. While Paula and Charlotte were examining them he said to De Stancy, as a stranger: 'Excuse my interruption, sir, but if you should think of copying any of the portraits, as you were stating just now to the ladies, my patent photographic process is at your service, and is, I believe, the only one which would be effectual in the dim indoor lights.'

'It is just what I was thinking of,' said De Stancy, now so far cooled down from his irritation as to be quite ready to accept Dare's adroitly suggested scheme.

On application to Paula she immediately gave De Stancy permission to photograph to any extent, and told Dare he might bring his instruments as soon as Captain De Stancy required them.

'Don't stare at her in such a brazen way!' whispered the latter to the young man, when Paula had withdrawn a few steps. 'Say, "I shall highly value the privilege of assisting Captain De Stancy in such a work."'

Dare obeyed, and before leaving De Stancy arranged to begin performing on his venerated forefathers the next morning, the youth so accidentally engaged agreeing to be there at the same time to assist in the technical operations.

III

As he had promised, De Stancy made use the next day of the coveted permission that had been brought about by the ingenious Dare. Dare's timely suggestion of tendering assistance had the practical result of relieving the other of all necessity for occupying his time with the proceeding, further than to bestow a perfunctory superintendence now and then, to give a colour to his regular presence in the fortress, the actual work of taking copies being carried on by the younger man.

The weather was frequently wet during these operations, and Paula, Miss De Stancy, and her brother, were often in the house whole mornings together. By constant urging and coaxing the latter would induce his gentle sister, much against her conscience, to leave him opportunities for speaking to Paula alone. It was mostly before some print or painting that these conversations occurred, while De Stancy was ostensibly occupied with its merits, or in giving directions to his photographer how to proceed. As soon as the dialogue began, the latter would withdraw out of earshot, leaving Paula to imagine him the most deferential young artist in the world.

'You will soon possess duplicates of the whole gallery,' she said on one of these occasions, examining

some curled sheets which Dare had printed off from the negatives.

'No,' said the soldier. 'I shall not have patience to go on. I get ill-humoured and indifferent, and then leave off.'

'Why ill-humoured?'

'I scarcely know—more than that I acquire a general sense of my own family's want of merit through seeing how meritorious the people are around me. I see them happy and thriving without any necessity for me at all; and then I regard these canvas grandfathers and grandmothers, and ask, "Why was a line so antiquated and out of date prolonged till now?"'

She chid him good-naturedly for such views. 'They will do you an injury,' she declared. 'Do spare yourself, Captain De Stancy!'

De Stancy shook his head as he turned the painting before him a little further to the light.

'But, do you know,' said Paula, 'that notion of yours of being a family out of date is delightful to some people. I talk to Charlotte about it often. I am never weary of examining those canopied effigies in the church, and almost wish they were those of my relations.'

'I will try to see things in the same light for your sake,' said De Stancy fervently.

'Not for my sake; for your own was what I meant, of course,' she replied with a repressive air.

Captain De Stancy bowed.

'What are you going to do with your photographs when you have them?' she asked, as if still anxious to obliterate the previous sentimental lapse.

'I shall put them into a large album, and carry them with me in my campaigns; and may I ask, now I have an opportunity, that you would extend your permission to copy a little further, and let me photograph one other painting that hangs in the castle, to fittingly complete my set?'

'Which?'

'That half-length of a lady which hangs in the morning-room. I remember seeing it in the Academy last year.'

Paula involuntarily closed herself up. The picture was her own portrait. 'It does not belong to your series,' she said somewhat coldly.

De Stancy's secret thought was, I hope from my soul it will belong some day! He answered with mildness: 'There is a sort of connection—you are my sister's friend.'

Paula assented.

'And hence, might not your friend's brother photograph your picture?'

Paula demurred.

A gentle sigh rose from the bosom of De Stancy. 'What is to become of me?' he said, with a light distressed laugh. 'I am always inconsiderate and inclined to ask too much. Forgive me! What was in my mind when I asked I dare not say.'

'I quite understand your interest in your family pictures—and all of it,' she remarked more gently, willing not to hurt the sensitive feelings of a man so full of romance.

'And in that *one!*' he said, looking devotedly at her. 'If I had only been fortunate enough to include it with the rest, my album would indeed have been a treasure to pore over by the bivouac fire!'

'O, Captain De Stancy, this is provoking perseverance!' cried Paula, laughing half crossly. 'I expected that after expressing my decision so plainly the first time I should not have been further urged upon the subject.' Saying which she turned and moved decisively away.

It had not been a productive meeting, thus far. 'One word!' said De Stancy, following and almost clasping her hand. 'I have given offence, I know: but do let it all fall on my own head—don't tell my

sister of my misbehaviour! She loves you deeply, and it would wound her to the heart.'

'You deserve to be told upon,' said Paula as she withdrew, with just enough playfulness to show that her anger was not too serious.

Charlotte looked at Paula uneasily when the latter joined her in the drawing-room. She wanted to say, 'What is the matter?' but guessing that her brother had something to do with it, forbore to speak at first. She could not contain her anxiety long. 'Were you talking with my brother?' she said.

'Yes,' returned Paula, with reservation. However, she soon added, 'He not only wants to photograph his ancestors, but *my* portrait too. They are a dreadfully encroaching sex, and perhaps being in the army makes them worse!'

'I'll give him a hint, and tell him to be careful.'

'Don't say I have definitely complained of him; it is not worth while to do that; the matter is too trifling for repetition. Upon the whole, Charlotte, I would rather you said nothing at all.'

De Stancy's hobby of photographing his ancestors seemed to become a perfect mania with him. Almost every morning discovered him in the larger apartments of the castle, taking down and rehanging the dilapidated pictures, with the assistance of the indispensable Dare; his fingers stained black with dust, and his face expressing a busy attention to the work in hand, though always reserving a look askance for the presence of Paula.

Though there was something of subterfuge, there was no deep and double subterfuge in all this. De Stancy took no particular interest in his ancestral portraits; but he was enamoured of Paula to weakness. Perhaps the composition of his love would hardly bear looking into, but it was recklessly frank and not quite mercenary. His photographic scheme was nothing worse than a lover's not too scrupulous contrivance. After the re-

fusal of his request to copy her picture he fumed and fretted at the prospect of Somerset's return before any impression had been made on her heart by himself; he swore at Dare, and asked him hotly why he had dragged him into such a hopeless dilemma as this.

'Hopeless? Somerset must still be kept away, so that it is not hopeless. I will consider how to prolong his stay.'

Thereupon Dare considered.

The time was coming—had indeed come—when it was necessary for Paula to make up her mind about her architect, if she meant to begin building in the spring. The two sets of plans, Somerset's and Havill's, were hanging on the walls of the room that had been used by Somerset as his studio, and were acessible by anybody. Dare took occasion to go and study both sets, with a view to finding a flaw in Somerset's which might have been passed over unnoticed by the committee of architects, owing to their absence from the actual site. But not a blunder could he find.

He next went to Havill; and here he was met by an amazing state of affairs. Havill's creditors, at last suspecting something mythical in Havill's assurance that the grand commission was his, had lost all patience; his house was turned upside-down, and a poster gleamed on the front wall, stating that the excellent modern household furniture was to be sold by auction on Friday next. Troubles had apparently come in battalions, for Dare was informed by a bystander that Havill's wife was seriously ill also.

Without staying for a moment to enter his friend's house, back went Mr. Dare to the castle, and told Captain De Stancy of the architect's desperate circumstances, begging him to convey the news in some way to Miss Power. De Stancy promised to make representations in the proper quarter without perceiving that he was doing the best possible deed for himself thereby.

He told Paula of Havill's misfortunes in the presence of his sister, who turned pale. She discerned how this misfortune would bear upon the undecided competition.

'Poor man,' murmured Paula. 'He was my father's architect, and somehow expected, though I did not promise it, the work of rebuilding the castle.'

Then De Stancy saw Dare's aim in sending him to Miss Power with the news; and, seeing it, concurred: Somerset was his rival, and all was fair. 'And is he not to have the work of the castle after expecting it?' he asked.

Paula was lost in reflection. 'The other architect's design and Mr. Havill's are exactly equal in merit, and we cannot decide how to give it to either,' explained Charlotte.

'That is our difficulty,' Paula murmured. 'A bankrupt, and his wife ill—dear me! I wonder what's the cause.'

'He has borrowed on the expectation of having to execute the castle works, and now he is unable to meet his liabilities.'

'It is very sad,' said Paula.

'Let me suggest a remedy for this dead-lock,' said De Stancy.

'Do,' said Paula.

'Do the work of building in two halves or sections. Give Havill the first half, since he is in need; when that is finished the second half can be given to your London architect. If, as I understand, the plans are identical except in ornamental details, there will be no difficulty about it at all.'

Paula sighed—just a little one; and yet the suggestion seemed to satisfy her by its reasonableness. She turned sad, wayward, but was impressed by De Stancy's manner and words. She appeared indeed to have a smouldering desire to please him. In the afternoon she said to Charlotte, 'I mean to do as your brother says.'

A note was despatched to Havill that very day, and in an hour the crestfallen architect presented himself at the castle. Paula instantly gave him audience, commiserated him, and commissioned him to carry out a first section of the buildings, comprising work to the extent of about twenty thousand pounds expenditure; and then, with a prematureness quite amazing among architects' clients, she handed him over a cheque for five hundred pounds on account.

When he had gone, Paula's bearing showed some sign of being disquieted at what she had done; but she covered her mood under a cloak of saucy serenity. Perhaps a tender remembrance of a certain thunderstorm in the foregoing August when she stood with Somerset in the arbour, and did not own that she loved him, was pressing on her memory and bewildering her. She had not seen quite clearly, in adopting De Stancy's suggestion, that Somerset would now have no professional reason for being at the castle for the next twelve months.

But the captain had, and when Havill entered the castle he rejoiced with great joy. Dare, too, rejoiced in his cold way, and went on with his photography, saying, 'The game progresses, captain.'

'Game? Call it Divine Comedy, rather!' said the soldier exultingly.

'He is practically banished for a year or more. What can't you do in a year, captain!'

Havill, in the meantime, having respectfully withdrawn from the presence of Paula, passed by Dare and De Stancy in the gallery as he had done in entering. He spoke a few words to Dare, who congratulated him. While they were talking somebody was heard in the hall, inquiring hastily for Mr. Havill.

'What shall I tell him?' demanded the porter.

'His wife is dead,' said the messenger.

Havill overheard the words, and hastened away.

'An unlucky man!' said Dare.

'That, happily for us, will not affect his installation here,' said De Stancy. 'Now hold your tongue and keep at a distance. She may come this way.'

Surely enough in a few minutes she came. De Stancy, to make conversation, told her of the new misfortune which had just befallen Mr. Havill.

Paula was very sorry to hear it, and remarked that it gave her great satisfaction to have appointed him as architect of the first wing before he learnt the bad news. 'I owe you best thanks, Captain De Stancy, for showing me such an expedient.'

'Do I really deserve thanks?' asked De Stancy. 'I wish I deserved a reward; but I must bear in mind the fable of the priest and the jester.'

'I never heard it.'

'The jester implored the priest for alms, but the smallest sum was refused, though the holy man readily agreed to give him his blessing. Query, its value?'

'How does it apply?'

'You give me unlimited thanks, but deny me the tiniest substantial trifle I desire.'

'What persistence!' exclaimed Paula, colouring. 'Very well, if you *will* photograph my picture you must. It is really not worthy further pleading. Take it when you like.'

When Paula was alone she seemed vexed with herself for having given way; and rising from her seat she went quietly to the door of the room containing the picture, intending to lock it up till further consideration, whatever he might think of her. But on casting her eyes round the apartment the painting was gone. The captain, wisely taking the current when it served, already had it in the gallery, where he was to be seen bending attentively over it, arranging the lights and directing Dare with the instruments. On leaving he thanked her, and said that he had obtained a splendid copy. Would she look at it?

Paula was severe and icy. 'Thank you—I don't wish to see it,' she said.

De Stancy bowed and departed in a glow of triumph; satisfied, notwithstanding her frigidity, that he had compassed his immediate aim, which was that she might not be able to dismiss from her thoughts him and his persevering desire for the shadow of her face during the next four-and-twenty-hours. And his confidence was well founded: she could not.

'I fear this Divine Comedy will be slow business for us, captain,' said Dare, who had heard her cold words.

'O no!' said De Stancy, flushing a little: he had not been perceiving that the lad had the measure of his mind so entirely as to gauge his position at any moment. But he would show no shamefacedness. 'Even if it is, my boy,' he answered, 'there's plenty of time before the other can come.'

At that hour and minute of De Stancy's remark 'the other,' to look at him, seemed indeed securely shelved. He was sitting lonely in his chambers far away, wondering why she did not write, and yet hoping to hear—wondering if it had all been but a short-lived strain of tenderness. He knew as well as if it had been stated in words that her serious acceptance of him as a suitor would be her acceptance of him as an architect—that her schemes in love would be expressed in terms of art; and conversely that her refusal of him as a lover would be neatly effected by her choosing Havill's plans for the castle, and returning his own with thanks. The position was so clear: he was so well walled in by circumstances that he was absolutely helpless.

To wait for the line that would not come—the letter saying that, as she had desired, his was the design that pleased her—was still the only thing to do. The (to Somerset) surprising accident that the committee of architects should have pronounced the designs absolutely equal in point of merit, and thus

have caused the final choice to revert after all to Paula, had been a joyous thing to him when he first heard of it, full of confidence in her favour. But the fact of her having again become the arbitrator, though it had made acceptance of his plans all the more probable, made refusal of them, should it happen, all the more crushing. He could have conceived himself favoured by Paula as her lover, even had the committee decided in favour of Havill as her architect. But not to be chosen as architect now was to be rejected in both kinds.

IV

IT was the Sunday following the funeral of Mrs. Havill, news of whose death had been so unexpectedly brought to her husband at the moment of his exit from Stancy Castle. The minister, as was his custom, improved the occasion by a couple of sermons on the uncertainty of life. One was preached in the morning in the old chapel of Markton; the second at evening service in the rural chapel near Stancy Castle, built by Paula's father, which bore to the first somewhat the relation of an episcopal chapel-of-ease to the mother church.

The unscreened lights blazed through the plate-glass windows of the smaller building and outshone the steely stars of the early night, just as they had done when Somerset was attracted by their glare four months before. The fervid minister's rhetoric equalled its force on that more romantic occasion: but Paula was not there. She was not a frequent attendant now at her father's votive building. The mysterious tank, whose dark waters had so repelled her at the last moment, was boarded over: a table stood on its centre, with an open quarto Bible upon it; behind which Havill, in a new suit of black, sat in a large chair. Havill held the office of deacon: and he had mechanically taken the deacon's seat as usual to-night, in the face of the congregation, and under the nose of Mr. Woodwell.

Mr. Woodwell was always glad of an opportunity. He was gifted with a burning natural eloquence, which, though perhaps a little too freely employed in exciting the 'Wertherism of the uncultivated,' had in it genuine power. He was a master of that oratory which no limitation of knowledge can repress, and which no training can impart. The neighbouring rector could eclipse Woodwell's scholarship, and the freethinker at the corner shop in Markton could demolish his logic; but the Baptist could do in five minutes what neither of these had done in a lifetime; he could move some of the hardest of men to tears.

Thus it happened that, when the sermon was fairly under way, Havill began to feel himself in a trying position. It was not that he had bestowed much affection upon his deceased wife, irreproachable woman as she had been; but the suddenness of her death had shaken his nerves, and Mr. Woodwell's address on the uncertainty of life involved considerations of conduct on earth that bore with singular directness upon Havill's unprincipled manœuvre for victory in the castle competition. He wished he had not been so inadvertent as to take his customary chair in the chapel. People who saw Havill's agitation did not know that it was most largely owing to his sense of the fraud which had been practised on the unoffending Somerset; and when, unable longer to endure the torture of Woodwell's words, he rose from his place and went into the chapel vestry, the preacher little thought that remorse for a contemptibly unfair act, rather than grief for a dead wife, was the cause of the architect's withdrawal.

When Havill got into the open air his morbid excitement calmed down, but a sickening self-abhorrence for the proceeding instigated by Dare did not abate. To appropriate another man's design was no more nor less than to embezzle his money or steal his goods. The intense reaction from his conduct of the past two or

three months did not leave him when he reached his own house and observed where the handbills of the countermanded sale had been torn down, as the result of the payment made in advance by Paula of money which should really have been Somerset's.

The mood went on intensifying when he was in bed. He lay awake till the clock reached those still, small, ghastly hours when the vital fires burn at their lowest in the human frame, and death seizes more of his victims than in any other of the twenty-four. Havill could bear it no longer; he got a light, went down into his office and wrote the note subjoined.

'MADAM,—The recent death of my wife necessitates a considerable change in my professional arrangements and plans with regard to the future. One of the chief results of the change is, I regret to state, that I no longer find myself in a position to carry out the enlargement of the castle which you had so generously entrusted to my hands.

'I beg leave therefore to resign all further connection with the same, and to express, if you will allow me, a hope that the commission may be placed in the hands of the other competitor. Herewith is returned a cheque for one-half of the sum so kindly advanced in anticipation of the commission I should receive; the other half, with which I had cleared off my immediate embarrassments before perceiving the necessity for this course, shall be returned to you as soon as some payments from other clients drop in.—I beg to remain, Madam, your obedient servant, JAMES HAVILL.'

Havill would not trust himself till the morning to post this letter. He sealed it up, went out with it into the street, and walked through the sleeping town to the post-office. At the mouth of the box he held the letter long. By dropping it, he was dropping at least two thousand five hundred pounds which, however obtained, were now securely his. It was a great deal to let go; and there he stood till another wave of conscience bore in upon his soul the absolute nature of the theft, and made him shudder. The footsteps of a solitary police-

man could be heard nearing him along the deserted street; hesitation ended, and he let the letter go.

When he awoke in the morning he thought over the circumstances by the cheerful light of a low eastern sun. The horrors of the situation seemed much less formidable; yet it cannot be said that he actually regretted his act. Later on he walked out, with the strange sense of being a man who, from one having a large professional undertaking in hand, had, by his own act, suddenly reduced himself to an unoccupied nondescript. From the upper end of the town he saw in the distance the grand grey towers of Stancy Castle looming over the leafless trees; he felt stupefied at what he had done, and said to himself with bitter discontent: 'Well, well, what is more contemptible than a half-hearted rogue!'

That morning the post-bag had been brought to Paula and Mrs. Goodman in the usual way, and Miss Power read the letter. His resignation was a surprise; the question whether he would or would not repay the money was passed over; the necessity of installing Somerset after all as sole architect was an agitation, or emotion, the precise nature of which it is impossible to accurately define.

However, she went about the house after breakfast with very much the manner of one who had had a weight removed either from her heart or from her conscience; moreover, her face was a little flushed when, in passing by Somerset's late studio, she saw the plans bearing his motto, and knew that his and not Havill's would be the presiding presence in the coming architectural turmoil. She went on further, and called to Charlotte, who was now regularly sleeping in the castle, to accompany her, and together they ascended to the telegraph-room in the donjon tower.

'Whom are you going to telegraph to?' said Miss De Stancy when they stood by the instrument.

'My architect.'

'O—Mr. Havill.'

'Mr. Somerset.'

Miss De Stancy had schooled her emotions on that side cruelly well, and she asked calmly, 'What, have you chosen him after all?'

'There is no choice in it—read that,' said Paula, handing Havill's letter, as if she felt that Providence had stepped in to shape ends that she was too undecided or unpractised to shape for herself.

'It is very strange,' murmured Charlotte; while Paula applied herself to the machine and despatched the words:—

'Miss Power, Stancy Castle, to G. Somerset, Esq., F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., Queen Anne's Chambers, St. James's.

'Your design is accepted in its entirety. It will be necessary to begin soon. I shall wish to see and consult you on the matter about the 10th instant.'

When the message was fairly gone out of the window Paula seemed still further to expand. The strange spell cast over her by something or other—probably the presence of De Stancy, and the weird romanticism of his manner towards her, which was as if the historic past had touched her with a yet living hand—in a great measure became dissipated, leaving her the arch and serene maiden that she had been before.

About this time Captain De Stancy and his Achates were approaching the castle, and had arrived about fifty paces from the spot at which it was Dare's custom to drop behind his companion, in order that their appearance at the lodge should be that of master and man.

Dare was saying, as he had said before: 'I can't help fancying, captain, that your approach to this castle and its mistress is by a very tedious system. Your trenches, zigzags, counterscarps, and ravelins may be all

very well, and a very sure system of attack in the long run; but upon my soul they are almost as slow in maturing as those of Uncle Toby himself. For my part I should be inclined to try an assault.'

'Don't pretend to give advice, Willy, on matters beyond your years.'

'I only meant it for your good, and your proper advancement in the world,' said Dare in wounded tones.

'Different characters, different systems,' returned the soldier. 'This lady is of a reticent, independent, complicated disposition, and any sudden proceeding would put her on her mettle. You don't dream what my impatience is, my boy. It is a thing transcending your utmost conceptions! But I proceed slowly; I know better than to do otherwise. Thank God there is plenty of time. As long as there is no risk of Somerset's return my situation is sure.'

'And professional etiquette will prevent him coming yet. Havill and he will change like the men in a sentry-box; when Havill walks out, he'll walk in, and not a moment before.'

'That will not be till eighteen months have passed. And as the Jesuit said, "Time and I against any two." . . . Now drop to the rear,' added Captain De Stancy authoritatively. And they passed under the walls of the castle.

The grave fronts and bastions were wrapped in silence; so much so, that, standing awhile in the inner ward, they could hear through an open window a faintly clicking sound from within.

'She's at the telegraph,' said Dare, throwing forward his voice softly to the captain. 'What can that be for so early? That wire is a nuisance, to my mind; such constant intercourse with the outer world is bad for our romance.'

The speaker entered to arrange his photographic apparatus, of which, in truth, he was getting weary; and

De Stancy smoked on the terrace till Dare should be ready. While he waited his sister looked out upon him from an upper casement, having caught sight of him as she came from Paula in the telegraph-room.

'Well, Lotty, what news this morning?' he said gaily.

'Nothing of importance. We are quite well.' . . . She added with hesitation, 'There is one piece of news; Mr. Havill—but perhaps you have heard it in Markton?'

'Nothing.'

'Mr. Havill has resigned his appointment as architect to the castle.'

'What?—who has it, then?'

'Mr. Somerset.'

'Appointed?'

'Yes—by telegraph.'

'When is he coming?' said De Stancy in consternation.

'About the tenth, we think.'

Charlotte was concerned to see her brother's face, and withdrew from the window that he might not question her further. De Stancy went into the hall, and on to the gallery, where Dare was standing as still as a caryatid.

'I have heard every word,' said Dare.

'Well, what does it mean? Has that fool Havill done it on purpose to annoy me? What conceivable reason can the man have for throwing up an appointment he has worked so hard for, at the moment he has got it, and in the time of his greatest need?'

Dare guessed, for he had seen a little way into Havill's soul during the brief period of their confederacy. But he was very far from saying what he guessed. Yet he unconsciously revealed by other words the nocturnal shades in his character which had made that confederacy possible.

'Somerset coming after all!' he replied. 'By God! that little six-barrelled friend of mine, and a good resolution, and he would never arrive!'

'What!' said Captain De Stancy, paling with horror as he gathered the other's sinister meaning.

Dare instantly recollected himself. 'One is tempted to say anything at such a moment,' he replied hastily.

'Since he is to come, let him come, for me,' continued De Stancy, with reactionary distinctness, and still gazing gravely into the young man's face. 'The battle shall be fairly fought out. Fair play, even to a rival—remember that, boy. . . . Why are you here?—unnaturally concerning yourself with the passions of a man of my age, as if you were the parent, and I the son? Would to heaven, Willy, you had done as I wished you to do, and led the life of a steady, thoughtful young man! Instead of meddling here, you should now have been in some studio, college, or professional man's chambers, engaged in a useful pursuit which might have made one proud to own you. But you were so precocious and headstrong; and this is what you have come to: you promise to be worthless!'

'I think I shall go to my lodgings to-day instead of staying here over these pictures,' said Dare, after a silence, during which Captain De Stancy endeavoured to calm himself. 'I was going to tell you that my dinner to-day will unfortunately be one of herbs, for want of the needful. I have come to my last stiver.—You dine at the mess, I suppose, captain?'

De Stancy had walked away; but Dare knew that he played a pretty sure card in that speech. De Stancy's heart could not withstand the suggested contrast between a lonely meal of bread-and-cheese and a well-ordered dinner amid cheerful companions.—'Here,' he said, emptying his pocket and returning to the lad's side. 'Take this, and order yourself a good meal. You keep me as poor as a crow. There shall be more to-morrow.'

The peculiarly bifold nature of Captain De Stancy, as shown in his conduct at different times, was something rare in life, and perhaps happily so. That mechanical admixture of black and white qualities without coalescence, on which the theory of men's characters was based by moral analysis before the rise of modern ethical schools, fictitious as it was in general application, would have almost hit off the truth as regards Captain De Stancy. Removed to some half-known century, his deeds would have won a picturesqueness of light and shade that might have made him a fascinating subject for some gallery of illustrious historical personages. It was this tendency to moral chequer-work which accounted for his varied bearings towards Dare.

Dare withdrew to take his departure. When he had gone a few steps, despondent, he suddenly turned, and ran back with some excitement.

'Captain—he's coming on the tenth, don't they say? Well, four days before the tenth comes the sixth. Have you forgotten what's fixed for the sixth?'

'I had quite forgotten!'

'That day will be worth three months of quiet attentions: with luck, skill, and a bold heart, what mayn't you do?'

Captain De Stancy's face softened with satisfaction.

'There is something in that; the game is not up after all. The sixth—it had gone clean out of my head, by gad!'

V

THE cheering message from Paula to Somerset sped through the loophole of Stancy Castle keep, over the trees, along the railway, under bridges, across four counties—from extreme antiquity of environment to sheer modernism—and finally landed itself on a table in Somerset's chambers in the midst of a cloud of fog. He read it and, in the moment of reaction from the depression of his past days, clapped his hands like a child.

Then he considered the date at which she wanted to see him. Had she so worded her despatch he would have gone that very day; but there was nothing to complain of in her giving him a week's notice. Pure maiden modesty might have checked her indulgence in a too ardent recall.

Time, however, dragged somewhat heavily along in the interim, and on the second day he thought he would call on his father and tell him of his success in obtaining the appointment.

The elder Mr. Somerset lived in a detached house in the north-west part of fashionable London; and ascending the chief staircase the young man branched off from the first landing and entered his father's painting-room. It was an hour when he was pretty sure of finding the well-known painter at work, and

on lifting the tapestry he was not disappointed, Mr. Somerset being busily engaged with his back towards the door.

Art and vitiated nature were struggling like wrestlers in that apartment, and art was getting the worst of it. The overpowering gloom pervading the clammy air, rendered still more intense by the height of the window from the floor, reduced all the pictures that were standing around to the wizened feebleness of corpses on end. The shadowy parts of the room behind the different easels were veiled in a brown vapour, precluding all estimate of the extent of the studio, and only subdued in the foreground by the ruddy glare from an open stove of Dutch tiles. Somerset's footsteps had been so noiseless over the carpeting of the stairs and landing, that his father was unaware of his presence; he continued at his work as before, which he performed by the help of a complicated apparatus of lamps, candles, and reflectors, so arranged as to eke out the miserable daylight to a power apparently sufficient for the neutral touches on which he was at that moment engaged.

The first thought of an unsophisticated stranger on entering that room could only be the amazed inquiry why a professor of the art of colour, which beyond all other arts requires pure daylight for its exercise, should fix himself on the single square league in habitable Europe to which light is denied at noonday for weeks in succession.

'O! it's you, George, is it?' said the Academician, turning from the lamps, which shone over his bald crown at such a slant as to reveal every cranial irregularity. 'How are you this morning? Still a dead silence about your grand castle competition?'

Somerset told the news. His father duly congratulated him, and added genially, 'It is well to be you, George. One large commission to attend to, and nothing to distract you from it. I am bothered by

having a dozen irons in the fire at once. And people are so unreasonable.—Only this morning, among other things, when you got your order to go on with your single study, I received a letter from a woman, an old friend whom I can scarcely refuse, begging me as a great favour to design her a set of theatrical costumes, in which she and her friends can perform for some charity. It would occupy me a good week to go into the subject and do the thing properly. Such are the sort of letters I get. I wish, George, you could knock out something for her before you leave town. It is positively impossible for me to do it with all this work in hand, and these eternal fogs to contend against.'

'I fear costumes are rather out of my line,' said the son. 'However, I'll do what I can. What period and country are they to represent?'

His father didn't know. He had never looked at the play of late years. It was 'Love's Labour's Lost.' 'You had better read it for yourself,' he said, 'and do the best you can.'

During the morning Somerset junior found time to refresh his memory of the play, and afterwards went and hunted up materials for designs to suit the same, which occupied his spare hours for the next three days. As these occupations made no great demands upon his reasoning faculties he mostly found his mind wandering off to imaginary scenes at Stancy Castle: particularly did he dwell at this time upon Paula's lively interest in the history, relics, tombs, architecture,—nay, the very Christian names of the De Stancy line, and her 'artistic' preference for Charlotte's ancestors instead of her own. Yet what more natural than that a clever meditative girl, encased in the feudal lumber of that family, should imbibe at least an antiquarian interest in it? Human nature at bottom is romantic rather than ascetic, and the local habitation which accident had provided for Paula was perhaps acting as a solvent of the hard,

morbidly introspective views thrust upon her in early life.

Somerset wondered if his own possession of a substantial genealogy like Captain De Stancy's would have had any appreciable effect upon her regard for him. His suggestion to Paula of her belonging to a worthy strain of engineers had been based on his content with his own intellectual line of descent through Pheidias, Ictinus and Callicrates, Chersiphron, Vitruvius, Wilars of Cambray, William of Wykeham, and the rest of that long and illustrious roll; but Miss Power's marked preference for an animal pedigree led him to muse on what he could show for himself in that kind.

These thoughts so far occupied him that when he took the sketches to his father, on the morning of the fifth, he was led to ask: 'Has any one ever sifted out our family pedigree?'

'Family pedigree?'

'Yes. Have we any pedigree worthy to be compared with that of professedly old families? I never remember hearing of any ancestor further back than my great-grandfather.'

Somerset the elder reflected and said that he believed there was a genealogical tree about the house somewhere, reaching back to a very respectable distance. 'Not that I ever took much interest in it,' he continued, without looking up from his canvas; 'but your great uncle John was a man with a taste for those subjects, and he drew up such a sheet: he made several copies on parchment, and gave one to each of his brothers and sisters. The one he gave to my father is still in my possession, I think.'

Somerset said that he should like to see it; but half-an-hour's search about the house failed to discover the document; and the Academician then remembered that it was in an iron box at his banker's. He had used it as a wrapper for some title-deeds and other

valuable writings which were deposited there for safety. 'Why do you want it?' he inquired.

The young man confessed his whim to know if his own antiquity would bear comparison with that of another person, whose name he did not mention; whereupon his father gave him a key that would fit the said chest, if he meant to pursue the subject further. Somerset, however, did nothing in the matter that day, but the next morning, having to call at the bank on other business, he remembered his new fancy.

It was about eleven o'clock. The fog, though not so brown as it had been on previous days, was still dense enough to necessitate lights in the shops and offices. When Somerset had finished his business in the outer office of the bank he went to the manager's room. The hour being somewhat early the only persons present in that sanctuary of balances, besides the manager who welcomed him, were two gentlemen, apparently lawyers, who sat talking earnestly over a box of papers. The manager, on learning what Somerset wanted, unlocked a door from which a flight of stone steps led to the vaults, and sent down a clerk and a porter for the safe.

Before, however, they had descended far a gentle tap came to the door, and in response to an invitation to enter a lady appeared, wrapped up in furs to her very nose.

The manager seemed to recognize her, for he went across the room in a moment, and set her a chair at the middle table, replying to some observation of hers with the words, 'O yes, certainly,' in a deferential tone.

'I should like it brought up at once,' said the lady.

Somerset, who had seated himself at a table in a somewhat obscure corner, screened by the lawyers, started at the words. The voice was Miss Power's, and so plainly enough was the figure as soon as he examined it. Her back was towards him, and either

because the room was only lighted in two places, or because she was absorbed in her own concerns, she seemed to be unconscious of any one's presence on the scene except the banker and herself. The former called back the clerk, and two other porters having been summoned they disappeared to get whatever she required.

Somerset, somewhat excited, sat wondering what could have brought Paula to London at this juncture, and was in some doubt if the occasion were a suitable one for revealing himself, her errand to her banker being possibly of a very private nature. Nothing helped him to a decision. Paula never once turned her head, and the progress of time was marked only by the murmurs of the two lawyers, and the ceaseless clash of gold and rattle of scales from the outer room, where the busy heads of cashiers could be seen through the partition moving about under the globes of the gas-lamps.

Footsteps were heard upon the cellar-steps, and the three men previously sent below staggered from the doorway, bearing a huge safe which nearly broke them down. Somerset knew that his father's box, or boxes, could boast of no such dimensions, and he was not surprised to see the chest deposited in front of Miss Power. When the immense accumulation of dust had been cleared off the lid, and the chest conveniently placed for her, Somerset was attended to, his modest box being brought up by one man unassisted, and without much expenditure of breath.

His interest in Paula was of so emotional a cast that his attention to his own errand was of the most perfunctory kind. She was close to a gas-standard, and the lawyers, whose seats had intervened, having finished their business and gone away, all her actions were visible to him. While he was opening his father's box the manager assisted Paula to unseal and unlock

hers, and he now saw her lift from it a morocco case, which she placed on the table before her, and unfastened. Out of it she took a dazzling object that fell like a cascade over her fingers. It was a necklace of diamonds and pearls, apparently of large size and many strands, though he was not near enough to see distinctly. When satisfied by her examination that she had got the right article she shut it into its case.

The manager closed the chest for her; and when it was again secured Paula arose, tossed the necklace into her hand-bag, bowed to the manager, and was about to bid him good morning. Thereupon he said with some hesitation: 'Pardon one question, Miss Power. Do you intend to take those jewels far?'

'Yes,' she said simply, 'to Stancy Castle.'

'You are going straight there?'

'I have one or two places to call at first.'

'I would suggest that you carry them in some other way—by fastening them into the pocket of your dress, for instance.'

'But I am going to hold the bag in my hand and never once let it go.'

The banker slightly shook his head. 'Suppose your carriage gets overturned: you would let it go then.'

'Perhaps so.'

'Or if you saw a child under the wheels just as you were stepping in; or if you accidentally stumbled in getting out; or if there was a collision on the railway—you might let it go.'

'Yes; I see I was too careless. I thank you.'

Paula removed the necklace from the bag, turned her back to the manager, and spent several minutes in placing her treasure in her bosom, pinning it and otherwise making it absolutely secure.

'That's it,' said the grey-haired man of caution, with evident satisfaction. 'There is not much danger now: you are not travelling alone?'

Paula replied that she was not alone, and went to the door. There was one moment during which Somerset might have conveniently made his presence known; but the juxtaposition of the bank-manager, and his own disarranged box of securities, embarrassed him: the moment slipped by, and she was gone.

In the meantime he had mechanically unearthed the pedigree, and, locking up his father's chest, Somerset also took his departure at the heels of Paula. He walked along the misty street, so deeply musing as to be quite unconscious of the direction of his walk. What, he inquired of himself, could she want that necklace for so suddenly? He recollected a remark of Dare's to the effect that her appearance on a particular occasion at Stancy Castle had been magnificent by reason of the jewels she wore; which proved that she had retained a sufficient quantity of those valuables at the castle for ordinary requirements. What exceptional occasion, then, was impending on which she wished to glorify herself beyond all previous experience? He could not guess. He was interrupted in these conjectures by a carriage nearly passing over his toes at a crossing in Bond Street: looking up he saw between the two windows of the vehicle the profile of a thickly mantled bosom, on which a camelia rose and fell. All the remainder part of the lady's person was hidden; but he remembered that flower of convenient season as one which had figured in the bank parlour half-an-hour earlier to-day.

Somerset hastened after the carriage, and in a minute saw it stop opposite a jeweller's shop. Out came Paula, and then another woman, in whom he recognized Mrs. Birch, one of the lady's maids at Stancy Castle. The young man was at Paula's side before she had crossed the pavement.

VI

A QUICK arrested expression in her two sapphirine eyes, accompanied by a little, a very little, blush which loitered long, was all the outward disturbance that the sight of her lover caused. The habit of self-repression at any new emotional impact was instinctive with her always. Somerset could not say more than a word; he looked his intense solicitude, and Paula spoke.

She declared that this was an unexpected pleasure. Had he arranged to come on the tenth as she wished? How strange that they should meet thus!—and yet not strange—the world was so small.

Somerset said that he was coming on the very day she mentioned—that the appointment gave him infinite gratification, which was quite within the truth.

'Come into this shop with me,' said Paula, with good-humoured authoritativeness.

They entered the shop and talked on while she made a small purchase. But not a word did Paula say of her sudden errand to town.

'I am having an exciting morning,' she said. 'I am going from here to catch the one-o'clock train to Markton.'

'It is important that you get there this afternoon, I suppose?'

'Yes. You know why?'

'Not at all.'

'The Hunt Ball. It was fixed for the sixth, and this is the sixth. I thought they might have asked you.'

'No,' said Somerset, a trifle gloomily. 'No, I am not asked. But it is a great task for you—a long journey and a ball all in one day.'

'Yes: Charlotte said that. But I don't mind it.'

'You are glad you are going. Are you glad?' he said softly.

Her air confessed more than her words. 'I am not so very glad that I am going to the Hunt Ball,' she replied confidentially.

'Thanks for that,' said he.

She lifted her eyes to his for a moment. Her manner had suddenly become so nearly the counterpart of that in the tea-house that to suspect any deterioration of affection in her was no longer generous. It was only as if a thin layer of recent events had overlaid her memories of him, until his presence swept them away.

Somerset looked up, and finding the shopman to be still some way off, he added, 'When will you assure me of something in return for what I assured you that evening in the rain?'

'Not before you have built the castle. My aunt does not know about it yet, nor anybody.'

'I ought to tell her.'

'No, not yet. I don't wish it.'

'Then everything stands as usual?'

She lightly nodded.

'That is, I may love you: but you still will not say you love me.'

She nodded again, and directing his attention to the advancing shopman, said, 'Please not a word more.'

Soon after this, they left the jeweller's, and parted, Paula driving straight off to the station and Somerset going on his way uncertainly happy. His re-impression after a few minutes was that a special journey to town

to fetch that magnificent necklace which she had not once mentioned to him, but which was plainly to be the medium of some proud purpose with her this evening, was hardly in harmony with her assertions of indifference to the attractions of the Hunt Ball.

He got into a cab and drove to his club, where he lunched, and mopingly spent a great part of the afternoon in making calculations for the foundations of the castle works. Later in the afternoon he returned to his chambers, wishing that he could annihilate the three days remaining before the tenth, particularly this coming evening. On his table was a letter in a strange writing, and indifferently turning it over he found from the superscription that it had been addressed to him days before at the Lord-Quantock-Arms Hotel, Markton, where it had lain ever since, the landlord probably expecting him to return. Opening the missive, he found to his surprise that it was, after all, an invitation to the Hunt Ball.

'Too late!' said Somerset. 'To think I should be served this trick a second time!'

After a moment's pause, however, he looked to see the time of day. It was five minutes past five—just about the hour when Paula would be driving from Markton Station to Stancy Castle to rest and prepare herself for her evening triumph. There was a train at six o'clock, timed to reach Markton between eleven and twelve, which by great exertion he might save even now, if it were worth while to undertake such a scramble for the pleasure of dropping in to the ball at a late hour. A moment's vision of Paula moving to swift tunes on the arm of a person or persons unknown was enough to impart the impetus required. He jumped up, flung his dress clothes into a portmanteau, sent down to call a cab, and in a few minutes was rattling off to the railway which had borne Paula away from London just five hours earlier.

Once in the train, he began to consider where and how he could most conveniently dress for the dance. The train would certainly be half-an-hour late; half-an-hour would be spent in getting to the town-hall, and that was the utmost delay tolerable if he would secure the hand of Paula for one spin, or be more than a mere dummy behind the earlier arrivals. He looked for an empty compartment at the next stoppage, and finding the one next his own unoccupied, he entered it and changed his raiment for that in his portmanteau during the ensuing run of twenty miles.

Thus prepared he awaited the Markton platform, which was reached as the clock struck twelve. Somerset called a fly and drove at once to the town-hall.

The borough natives had ascended to their upper floors, and were putting out their candles one by one as he passed along the streets; but the lively strains that proceeded from the central edifice revealed distinctly enough what was going on among the temporary visitors from the neighbouring manors. The doors were opened for him, and entering the vestibule lined with flags, flowers, evergreens, and escutcheons, he stood looking into the furnace of gaiety beyond.

It was some time before he could gather his impressions of the scene, so perplexing were the lights, the motions, the toilets, the full-dress uniforms of officers and the harmonies of sound. Yet light, sound, and movement were not so much the essence of that giddy scene as an intense aim at obliviousness in the beings composing it. For two or three hours at least those whirling young people meant not to know that they were mortal. The room was beating like a heart, and the pulse was regulated by the trembling strings of the most popular quadrille band in Wessex. But at last his eyes grew settled enough to look critically around.

The room was crowded — too crowded. Every variety of fair one, beauties primary, secondary, and

tertiary, appeared among the personages composing the throng. There were suns and moons; also pale planets of little account. Broadly speaking, these daughters of the county fell into two classes: one the pink-faced unsophisticated girls from neighbouring rectories and small country-houses, who knew not town except for an occasional fortnight, and who spent their time from Easter to Lammas Day much as they spent it during the remaining nine months of the year: the other class were the children of the wealthy landowners who migrated each season to the town-house; these were pale and collected, showed less enjoyment in their countenances, and wore in general an approximation to the languid manners of the capital.

A quadrille was in progress, and Somerset scanned each set. His mind had run so long upon the necklace, that his glance involuntarily sought out that gleaming object rather than the personality of its wearer. At the top of the room there he beheld it; but it was on the neck of Charlotte De Stancy.

The whole lucid explanation broke across his understanding in a second. His dear Paula had fetched the necklace that Charlotte should not appear to disadvantage among the county people by reason of her poverty. It was generously done—a disinterested act of sisterly kindness; theirs was the friendship of Hermia and Helena. Before he had got further than to realize this, there wheeled round amongst the dancers a lady whose *tournure* he recognized well. She was Paula; and to the young man's vision a superlative something distinguished her from all the rest. This was not dress or ornament, for she had hardly a gem upon her, her attire being a model of effective simplicity. Her partner was Captain De Stancy.

The discovery of this latter fact slightly obscured his appreciation of what he had discovered just before. It was with rather a lowering brow that he asked himself

whether Paula's *prédilection d'artiste*, as she called it, for the De Stancy line might not lead to a *prédilection* of a different sort for its last representative which would be not at all satisfactory.

The architect remained in the background till the dance drew to a conclusion, and then he went forward. The circumstance of having met him by accident once already that day seemed to quench any surprise in Miss Power's bosom at seeing him now. There was nothing in her parting from Captain De Stancy, when he led her to a seat, calculated to make Somerset uneasy after his long absence. Though, for that matter, this proved nothing; for, like all wise maidens, Paula never ventured on the game of the eyes with a lover in public; well knowing that every moment of such indulgence overnight might mean an hour's sneer at her expense by the indulged gentleman next day, when weighing womankind by the aid of a cold morning light and a bad headache.

While Somerset was explaining to Paula and her aunt the reason of his sudden appearance, their attention was drawn to a seat a short way off by a fluttering of ladies round the spot. In a moment it was whispered that somebody had fallen ill, and in another that the sufferer was Miss De Stancy. Paula, Mrs. Goodman, and Somerset at once joined the group of friends who were assisting her. Neither of them imagined for an instant that the unexpected advent of Somerset on the scene had anything to do with the poor girl's indisposition.

She was assisted out of the room, and her brother, who now came up, prepared to take her home, Somerset exchanging a few civil words with him, which the hurry of the moment prevented them from continuing; though on taking his leave with Charlotte, who was now better, De Stancy informed Somerset in answer to a cursory inquiry, that he hoped to be back again at the ball in half-an-hour.

When they were gone Somerset, feeling that now another dog might have his day, sounded Paula on the delightful question of a dance.

Paula replied in the negative.

'How is that?' asked Somerset with reproachful disappointment.

'I cannot dance again,' she said in a somewhat depressed tone; 'I must be released from every engagement to do so, on account of Charlotte's illness. I should have gone home with her if I had not been particularly requested to stay a little longer, since it is as yet so early, and Charlotte's illness is not very serious.'

If Charlotte's illness was not very serious, Somerset thought, Paula might have stretched a point; but not wishing to hinder her in showing respect to a friend so well liked by himself, he did not ask it. De Stancy had promised to be back again in half-an-hour, and Paula had heard the promise. But at the end of twenty minutes, still seeming indifferent to what was going on around her, she said she would stay no longer, and reminding Somerset that they were soon to meet and talk over the rebuilding, drove off with her aunt to Stancy Castle.

Somerset stood looking after the retreating carriage till it was enveloped in shades that the lamps could not disperse. The ball-room was now virtually empty for him, and feeling no great anxiety to return thither he stood on the steps for some minutes longer, looking into the calm mild night, and at the dark houses behind whose blinds lay the burghers with their eyes sealed up in sleep. He could not but think that it was rather too bad of Paula to spoil his evening for a sentimental devotion to Charlotte which could do the latter no appreciable good; and he would have felt seriously hurt at her move if it had not been equally severe upon Captain De Stancy, who was doubtless hastening back, full of a belief that she would still be found there.

The star of gas-jets over the entrance threw its light upon the walls on the opposite side of the street, where there were notice-boards of forthcoming events. In glancing over these for the fifth time, his eye was attracted by the first words of a placard in blue letters, of a size larger than the rest, and moving onward a few steps he read :—

STANCY CASTLE.

By the kind permission of MISS POWER,

A PLAY

Will shortly be performed at the above CASTLE,

IN AID OF THE FUNDS OF THE

COUNTY HOSPITAL,

By the Officers of the

ROYAL HORSE ARTILLERY,

MARKTON BARRACKS,

ASSISTED BY SEVERAL

LADIES OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.

The cast and other particulars will be duly announced in small bills. Places will be reserved on application to Mr. Clangham, High Street, Markton, where a plan of the room may be seen.

N.B.—The Castle is about twenty minutes' drive from Markton Station, to which there are numerous convenient trains from all parts of the county.

In a profound study Somerset turned and re-entered the ball-room, where he remained gloomily standing

here and there for about five minutes, at the end of which he observed Captain De Stancy, who had returned punctually to his word, crossing the hall in his direction.

The gallant officer darted glances of lively search over every group of dancers and sitters; and then with rather a blank look in his face, he came on to Somerset. Replying to the latter's inquiry for his sister that she had nearly recovered, he said, 'I don't see my father's neighbours anywhere.'

'They have gone home,' replied Somerset, a trifle drily. 'They asked me to make their apologies to you for leading you to expect they would remain. Miss Power was too anxious about Miss De Stancy to care to stay longer.'

The eyes of De Stancy and the speaker met for an instant. That curious guarded understanding, or inimical confederacy, which arises at moments between two men in love with the same woman, was present here; and in their mutual glances each said as plainly as by words that her departure had ruined his evening's hope.

They were now about as much in one mood as it was possible for two such differing natures to be. Neither cared further for elaborating giddy curves on that town-hall floor. They stood talking languidly about this and that local topic, till De Stancy turned aside for a short time to speak to a dapper little lady who had beckoned to him. In a few minutes he came back to Somerset.

'Mrs. Camperton, the wife of Major Camperton of my battery, would very much like me to introduce you to her. She is an old friend of your father's, and has wanted to know you for a long time.'

De Stancy and Somerset crossed over to the lady, and in a few minutes, thanks to her flow of spirits, she and Somerset were chatting with remarkable freedom.

'It is a happy coincidence,' continued Mrs. Camperton, 'that I should have met you here, immediately

after receiving a letter from your father: indeed it reached me only this morning. He has been so kind! We are getting up some theatricals, as you know, I suppose, to help the funds of the County Hospital, which is in debt.'

'I have just seen the announcement—nothing more.'

'Yes, such an estimable purpose; and as we wished to do it thoroughly well, I asked Mr. Somerset to design us the costumes, and he has now sent me the sketches. It is quite a secret at present, but we are going to play Shakespeare's romantic drama, 'Love's Labour's Lost,' and we hope to get Miss Power to take the leading part. You see, being such a handsome girl, and so wealthy, and rather an undiscovered novelty in the county as yet, she would draw a crowded room, and greatly benefit the funds.'

'Miss Power going to play herself?—I am rather surprised,' said Somerset. 'Whose idea is all this?'

'O, Captain De Stancy's—he's the originator entirely. You see he is so interested in the neighbourhood, his family having been connected with it for so many centuries, that naturally a charitable object of this local nature appeals to his feelings.'

'Naturally!' her listener laconically repeated. 'And have you settled who is to play the junior gentleman's part, leading lover, hero, or whatever he is called?'

'Not absolutely; though I think Captain De Stancy will not refuse it; and he is a very good figure. At present it lies between him and Mr. Mild, one of our young lieutenants. My husband, of course, takes the heavy line; and I am to be the second lady, though I am rather too old for the part really. If we can only secure Miss Power for heroine the cast will be excellent.'

'Excellent!' said Somerset, with a spectral smile.